

BEDESMAN 4

MARY·J·H·SKRINE



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BEDESMAN 4

BY

MARY J. H. SKRINE

Author of "A Stepson of the Soil,"

"The House of the Luck," Etc.

FRONTISPIECE BY

ESTHER C. ADLINGTON

"Novæ frondes et non sua poma."



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1914

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Published, April, 1914

**TO
THE INHERITORS**

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CONTENTS

	BOOK I	PAGE
PASTURES NEW		3
	BOOK II	
THE DEAD HAND		57
	BOOK III	
DENIAL		107
	BOOK IV	
GWEN		199
EPILOGUE		277

Book I
Pastures New

Bedesman 4

I

THERE were two of them, a boy and a girl. For one, this fact had wholly sufficed so far.

There never had been more. Neither could recall a time when there had been less. There were but sixteen months between them. As Granny Bold told Mother at the time, twins would have been a lot less work. But Mother, whose deepest principles forbade her to desire what was not "sent," replied seriously that she was best off as the Lord pleased. Deep within she knew she wished for nothing but Life's good gifts as they were. They grew together; the boy, strong on his feet,

when he got to them, and absorbingly interested in Baby's comings-on and creepings; till he guided her triumphantly beyond the kitchen and wash-house on to the broad flags of the sunny garden path between the wall-flowers and the parrot tulips. Thence they started, steadily and at their ease, to travel on together: both clearly aware of a broad road and a merry one stretching on and on, under good sunshine. This outlook Mother's grave pieties in no way altered. Calmly, naturally, and without warning or flourish of trumpets, the road led them to an afternoon in September, fresh and fair and soft with autumn's earliest finger touch; which afternoon was a beginning.

The boy stood leaning his arms along a time-worn gate between one wide, green meadow and the corner of another. A green lane, a worn stony road-track in its midst, ran away to his right between high,

ragged green banks. Beyond the near fields, swept by great, purpling cloud-shadows and bounded by far blue hills, a wide landscape stretched, sown with scattered gray villages, which thrust ancient church towers through "immemorial elms" in the mid-distance. The girl sat on the bank and looked at the boy, who was rubbing his round chin reflectively up and down his sleeve. Still, serious, unsmiling, his brown eyes gazed up the grassy lane.

His comely childish head came of a handsome family, nay, of two. But the shapely brow, the absorbed gaze, the young, still lips, wore an unexplained air of power that was their own. You looked at him twice. He wore gray knickers, knit stockings, stout shoes and an ancient smock-frock, a garment now, alas! fast disappearing from the earth. That same Granny Bold, a "terr'ble one to sew," had made three of them for her dame-

school boy William, far away in "Father's" childhood. Mother had put one by to be a "pattern" for Emily. The other two, on week-days, David was doing his level best to wear out. Hate it as you may, there is a fearful amount of "stand-by" in a well-made smock. David looks back with a tender smile to this discipline of his childhood, that his mother thought good for him. He has as yet known only one woman fit to be a patch on his mother's back.

Emily rose and wandered down the lane. Her round face, fresh and sandy-haired, was just the plain, wholesome countenance of a healthy country child, whose chief attraction lay in a greeting look of unconscious sincerity and good-will. Outwardly, she was comfortable Granny Bold over again; who always suggested the full moon. Dave was "at some of his thinkings," and an unoccupied Emily gathered red and

black briony with resignation and slowly. There was nothing morbid about Emily, but childish love is like the daughters of the horseleech, crying, "Give! give!"

To her surprise a quick call brought her back. Dave stood upright; his eyes were eager.

"Em'ly—thee got to stand like *that*. I 've a-got all of it! Look ee! Down lane there Cromwell's soldiers did go that day, all a-running. (The pack-horses did use to come up along under the wood, like Dad said.) They run all down through Pike's Piece there and 'long under th' archway right away to river; and there 'em fell in wi' Squire Damer and 's men, as cut 'em all to pieces. They drove 'em right up and past here again. That 's why we calls it Bloody Lane."

Though tea-time approached, the sun was new-risen for Emily. She followed him through ellipses, mixed pronouns and

all, though the relevance of the pack-horses remained as Greek to her.

“How do ee know?” she said, awestruck.

But at the bottom of her mind lay the rooted belief that he knew all things. The trouble of learning with him counted for nothing.

“That gentleman what ’s stopping up to Rect’ry come in school. We was reading and he come and telled up to we boys ’bout our countryside, and the fighting as was. Folks knows a lot more things nor they did use to.”

“So ’em do,” said Emily solemnly.

“You shut your eyes and think how ’em looked! Helt-skelt! A-bangin’ and a-clangin’—”

“Must a’ looked just about horrid all a-bleedin’,” said frail woman.

He laughed. “I ’d a’ been there, broke head or none! You could get on, them days.”

“So you can now-days,” said Emily sturdily. As though any one could ever have got on, if he could not!

“How do you come at it? I be goin’ to work after harvest. Fine lot o’ chances then!”

She rubbed herself against his shoulder silently. He had never said it so plain before.

His eyes wandered back up the lane. He opened the gate and came through, and stood, absorbed again.

“Sis, thee got to go home wi’ theeself. I’m for up to Rect’ry, now as ever is. He did ought to know, and he mid be gone to-morrow.”

Emily swallowed down quite a small sigh.

“All right. I ’ll tell Mother.”

Along the field-path and over the stile she trotted submissive away, towards certain brown farm roofs and a clustered

group of gray cottages, half-a-mile off. The skirmish in Bloody Lane vanished from her mental vision. It had been seen through other eyes. Quietly, without any emotional pathos, her heart within ached a little. For she could not see what there was to happen except his going to work, "underground" most likely. Emily was not a person of imagination. Nevertheless she saw Dave's face clearly, the day he would leave school; as clearly as Dave saw Squire Damer's men.

Through another and more tangled green lane, she took a turn to the left leading to the cottages.

David went straight to the Rectory's open front door. He had tugged at the worn wooden lozenge that was the bell-pull before he suddenly knew that "Mother 'd have a fit." The peal, resounding, raised a hot blush. But he was going through with things.

“Beg pardon, please, miss, could I see that gentleman what’s stopping here, please, miss?”

The parlor-maid stepped past him, turning the corner of the house to where the westering sun lay warm on the garden bench.

“One of the boys, sir, is asking—”

But David had followed her.

“Please, sir,—” his words ran over each other, “make so bold, sir, please, sir, I been down Bloody Lane, sir. I can see ’t all just like you said, same as ’t was a picture, sir. And Father, he says—”

The man with the large, hirsute, gray head and the ill-fitting brown coat sat upright suddenly. He lifted a big book off his knee on to the seat.

“Eh? (I saw you at the school.) What is it about Bloody Lane? Does your father know anything?”

“No, sir,— Yes, sir, please. Th’ old

pack-horse way from Devizes did use to come along Bloody Lane over Pike's Piece—"

"Pike's Piece?" The gentleman sat more upright still. "Is it far, boy?"

"No, sir, just through churchyard and down meadow over the stile."

"Come along," cried the gentleman.

They were crossing the churchyard before David knew much more, for this gentleman was wont to *go*, when he was set going. "Pike's Piece, Charley's Arch," he was muttering. "What put the pack-horses into your head, boy?"

"Please, sir, my Gramfer he could mind of 'em, when he were little. And you said as they come from Devizes, sir."

"So I did." The gentleman's look dwelt on the smock frock, on the curious unconsciousness of the eager eyes. "What made you think out all this, eh?"

“Please, sir, you telled up that interesting. An’ I got studdin’, and seemed like as I could see ’em. And I do want to know—”

“Got studdin’, did you? That’s the way to learn. What do you want to know?”

David drew a long breath, gathering his forces of expression.

“Please, sir— in them days, did you ought to ha’ gone wi’ Squire Damer for the King, sir? or did you ought to ha’ followed wi’ the Parli’ment?”

The gentleman pulled up in the midst of the meadow, and rubbed one side of his nose.

“My good boy,—all my life I ’ve been at that question. I wish I could tell you. I wish to God I could.”

His voice fell suddenly quite solemn and he ceased to rub his nose.

“Personally, for myself—but what’s a

temperament? The events— What would you have done yourself, boy?"

David's face cleared.

"I should a' gone wi' Squire," he replied at once, "sure to. There was Bolds here, see, in them days, (and looked on, Mother says), and Fielders too; and worked for Damers, all on 'em did. But I don't know as Damers was right. King, he were a' ways a-choppin' and a-changin', and breakin' his word times and often. And he was on'y one. And the tothers was for freedom, like Mr. Gladstone and them as set up the co-ops."

The gentleman smiled all over his curious, eager face and down into his shaggy beard. He began to walk on.

"You've got the right sow by the ear. But the King was n't *one*. He was an embodied principle too, then; just as Victoria is. You seem to think about these things."

“Mr. Dicey, he give me a book— Please sir, yonder ’s Pike’s Piece, where the tur-muts is, and this here ’s Bloody Lane.”

“Ay! Ay! Now the pack-road—”

“Down there. But you ’d have to climb the fence—”

It presently appeared that the gentleman regarded the prosecution of trespassers as an irrelevance. The golden sun was near setting and they had walked about two miles before they stood again by the old gate that looked on Bloody Lane.

“David Bold, The Wick,” read the gentleman from his note-book before he thrust it into his pocket. “I ’ll send you that book. You ’ll find it a bit stiff. But it ’ll set you ‘studdin’.’ That ’s the main thing.” His fingers closed on something round in his waistcoat pocket and he stared stonily over the boy’s head at the church tower. No. Not to a fellow-studder. He nodded. “Good-by to you.” David

touched his forehead, and turned away with a lingering look.

The gentleman thrust his hands into his pockets and walked reflectively down Bloody Lane, whistling low between his teeth. At the turning he pulled up. "Ay. Ay," he muttered, "the boy 's right. You can see it all, same as 't was a picture."

At the Rectory he turned indoors and went to his friend's study.

"I say, Richards, is Dicey the name of your schoolmaster?"

Crossing Pike's Piece, David remembered as in a dream that he had had no tea, and forgot it again. He thrilled yet to the stimulus of that quest after the pack-horse road; and he knew that he liked that bearded man better than any human being he had ever met. The understanding between them was a new thing in life. But

there was with David a thing bigger than any man: a widening of his whole being, a waking, a moving. At a gap in the hedge he stopped and gazed. The sun behind him had dropped in the last moments. Vale and hills lay silent under the faint bluish-gray haze of early evening. The boy's eyes widened and widened. He had grown up with that landscape as with his mother's face. It had words for him that no one knew. In eager moments, his soul turned to it wordlessly. But he was not consciously thinking of it.

It is fearfully interesting to be young and not to understand yourself. But there are moments when things not yourself engulf all that.

The boy in the smock-frock knew dumbly that he was very small and waiflike, and alone in the vast world with dreams that no one would understand, even himself. The peasant does not 'accept his fate'; he

dwells in the midst of it. But this one was aware that he did not know what it was. Only, like a bright-eyed frail young man, who wrote a certain letter of dedication from Davos Platz, he was sure that "the best that is in us is better than we can understand."

Then all at once the dream broke, and he knew he was ragingly hungry. He turned and made the quickest of ways home to the gray knot of old cottages. In an open doorway Emily sat, darning a sock of Father's.

"Sis, be there any tea left? Where's Mother?"

II

ON a Saturday "Quar' come out" (in the speech of Broughton Priors) at midday: tired men, having earned their Sabbath, emerging to look upon the sun till Monday.

William Bold's Esther moved, with deft, silent hands and step, in the deep-thatched stone cottage, that stood back behind its glowing front garden. There were wives, if you 'd believe it—as she sorrowfully did—would encourage a man to take dinner with him the same on Saturday as other days: as though they 'd never heard of afternoons at the King's Arms. But this quiet, paven place did not look as though its mistress were one of "them as must be all of a clutter," because the week was ending.

Having washed the onions and her own hands, Mrs. Bold stood for a moment in the sunny doorway: a handsome, dark-eyed woman, whose fine, serious face was full of character. Only to meet her going to shop was to be aware of a personality. Her beautiful eyes, severely steady but altogether benign, lacked something of the country-woman's wide readiness of reply. She thought for herself, measuring others with a grave courtesy as respectful as her old-fashioned "drop-curchy" at sight of her "betters." You felt that you probably fell short. If you were sick or innocently sad, she met you with a large love not to be forgotten. But from herself, and so far as in her lay, from those around her, she exacted a standard above everyday, comfortable conventions. You had to live for God in the world. It was not very likely to be easy. In daily life she bore about with her a scrupulous dignity of the neat and

the clean, the capable, the careful. Her children did not know what it was to see Mother look a slattern like some of the women. Her oldest gown and shoes were tidy. Her blue plates, that had come on from Granny Fielder, were pale with a careful old age: but Esther never chipped a thing; and taught Emily, that would go to service, a like care, as a grave duty owed to God and man.

It was still much too early for William when some one rapped on the door and an unknown voice asked if Mrs. Bold lived nearby. The visitor puzzled her. He was clearly a gentleman, but no parson. She found him scarcely tidy to be seen, especially his beard; and he was far from convenient in "the mid of the morning." Good manners, however, bade her greet him with,

"Pray, sir, to walk in. There 's a step down here, just inside. And it's a bit dark

—if you 'll mind your head, sir. Please to be seated."

She waited his pleasure, while he looked round silently. He never had seen an interior like this, out of a picture, or a novel by the wife of the Warden of Cuthbert's. Its wide hearth and hanging pot, the bacon-rack between the black beam and the wall, the dark dresser with its worn crockery, all gave him the shock of pleasure that comes with old things that are new. The woman belonged to it all. Both wore a curious and unconscious dignity, that hitherto he had only met in association with great things of the past. A queer shyness gripped him. It was time he spoke. He had pictured the interview as easy enough. It began to look different.

"You 're Mrs. Bold?" he said.

"Yes—unless 't was Granny you was wanting, my mother-law, sir? She lives down to the farm cottages."

“No,” said the visitor, “I expect it’s you. You’ve a boy, have n’t you? Called David.”

Esther Bold’s quiet face changed, subtly and completely.

“I have, sir—”

“Ah, well, I fell in with your boy two days ago. Perhaps he told you—”

“Yes, sir”—her eyes were just like the boy’s—“the gentleman as took him down Bloody Lane—”

“Well, no. He took me. I had a talk with the boys in school-time. In the afternoon he came to the Rectory door—”

“Not the front door, I’m sure I hope, sir?”

“Oh, the front door, I suppose. I can’t say. He came round the corner after the maid to tell me he’d found out something bearing on what I’d been saying, and took me off there and then.” The stranger ceased speaking. Their looks met. Up to

now she had not been sure that she liked him. His eyes were clear and gray: they met her with a gravity and a sort of calm aloofness, which appealed to her inmost instincts. She saw at once that he had something responsible to say and was thinking how best to say it, just as she might herself. She yielded, wondering, not unafraid.

“Your boy,” he said slowly, “is not quite an ordinary boy. He ’s— What are you going to do with him, Mrs. Bold?”

David’s mother moved in her chair.

“His father, sir, thought upon taking him down quarry; you can put your own boy along. My mind don’t go with it. Down there in the dark, they forgets the Lord something terrible,—the talk and that. On the land you don’t take the same money. There ’s the stables, or there ’s service. He ’s a bright boy—”

“Bright!” The gentleman’s voice made

her jump. "He 's brilliant. You ought to keep him to school—"

"Begging your pardon, sir, if you 're thinking of the sums and that, the country boys they don't have their health in them shops, for all they may be clever."

Her guest moved his chair, with a loud scroop of its legs on the stone floor, and leaned forward. He seemed to take Esther Bold into a large, firm, and quite unknown grasp. It was the grip of the expert.

"Look here, my—my good soul. Put all those things out of your mind, while I explain. That boy is meant for his books. Much more than that. There are two kinds of gifted man, Mrs. Bold: the steady useful fellow, who turns to most things with success—and the *first-rater*. He stands by himself! He has got to do *one* thing. Put him to another job, you waste him alive. But that *one*, he 'll do su-

perbly, as no other in his generation can do it. He 's *himself*, that man, not a type of the race. Do you take me?"

The dark eyes were fixed on him.

"I am striving to, sir." Her quiet tone quivered a little.

"That man"—his voice dropped—"is your David, Mrs. Bold. You 've got to face it. He has what we call the historic mind. I know it, could n't mistake it, it 's my own shop. But David will be a bigger man than I am. He must follow me and others, must—"

There Esther Bold moved and spoke. It was not manners, but she had to stem the tide.

"I 'm no scholar, nor I have n't any gift: but oh, sir! 'tis not the things as we 'd choose: 'tis what the Lord sends, for we to do wi' our might. My David he got to serve in that state of life, him lookin' to a better. We have to teach the children,

sir, for to make their callin' and election sure—"

It was a kind, even a fatherly smile; but that grip relaxed not one whit.

"A grand Book, the Bible, Mrs. Bold. It's given you the precise word I wanted. Listen. Nicholas' School at Spetterton takes boys from the national schools on their ancient Foundation. I am one of their trustees and have a nomination to give. The present Master, a pupil of mine, is at home. I made it my business yesterday to see him, and he says your boy should be well able to pass the entrance examination. He'd then get a free education: they would run him for one of their History scholarships at my own College; at nineteen he would be coming up to Oxford with the world before him. That's your David's calling, Mrs. Bold." The smile broadened. "I feel pretty sure of what I'm telling you. It's my business

to know a born student when I see him: David will shape as I expect."

He ceased and watched her, realizing that he had a definite thing to reckon with; that it was expressed in this woman, whose eyes, wide and lovely and profoundly serious, had felt their way after him slowly. A weighty pause fell. He was patient. At last Mrs. Bold rose with a glance at the clock.

"If you 'll please to excuse me, sir."

The two plates bore the washed onions, peeled potatoes, turnips, and fresh young carrots. She laid on sticks to kindle the faded fire. The hanging pot worked upon an anciently devised hook, that even amid the annoyance of this check delighted his heart. Mrs. Bold bestowed her vegetables within; the plates went tidily back to the dresser. One might have thought her scarcely alive to a crucial moment: but the man who wanted her David had a con-

sciousness of firmly repressed emotion in the air. She returned to her place. "I 'm sure, sir, I can't tell how to thank you—taking thought like you have." Then she sat looking at the flickering fire. The black pot began to whisper gently. He remembered sardonically remarking to another eminent novelist that, when the Wardeness of Cuthbert's opened a cottage door, you were conscious of hidden tragedy and a smell of onions. Mrs. Bold's onions seemed to have no smell. About herself there was no tragedy, nor anything that resented: only a sort of fervent and intense gravity, wherewith one did not intermeddle. She raised her eyes to his.

"You 'd be making our boy—a gentleman, sir?"

He felt himself flush.

"At Oxford his companions would be—other gentlemen. All scholars are equal there, Mrs. Bold."

He believed it fiercely; but he wondered if he were deceiving her. With the next words his inward thermometer dropped: but he thought, quite wrongly, that he understood her the better.

“ ’T would be a long while before he ’d be making much,” she said reflectively. “We have n’t but the one boy to look to, if F’ther was took; wi’ one of them accidents might be—” She paused. “I think as I ’ve took it all in. He ’d have to go now directly, ’ouldn’ he, sir? If I was to go in Spetterton wi’ carrier, could I see that gentleman, and talk wi’ him?”

“Certainly you could. I ’ll give you a note.” He tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and she fetched from her mother’s gate-legged table a thin white envelope, which he addressed with a firm pencil.

“I ’ll have to talk to his father. I ’m sure, sir, we ’turns you many thanks. We ’ll take the good Sunday for to turn

it over, and I 'll step up to Rect'ry Monday or Tuesday. You 're leaving, sir? Then I 'll write. Where to, please?"

"Ah, yes. My name 's Brownlow—Professor Brownlow." He wrote "Oxford" beyond the name of a College, and handed her his card. Both had risen: for an instant he stood looking at the grave-eyed, personable woman with her curious air of refinement that had nothing to do with 'breeding.'

"You 'll have to give in," he said smiling; "there 's that in your boy will go its own way, whatever we do."

Esther Bold's lips moved in a slow smile and she sighed.

" 'Tis like that with the children, good guide 'em—maybe you got 'em of your own, sir? Good morning, and my service to you, I'm sure. Your kindness 'll be give back to you, sir. That 's certain."

III

ESTHER BOLD fetched the white cloth from the dresser-drawer. The Professor's back had disappeared along the road. She laid the table a little elaborately, then she went and stood at the door. It seemed not a morning's length, but years since she sent her white-clad quarryman away after his breakfast. She wanted to see him approaching, and yet she shrank. Till he came this moving thing was her own only. Her heart within her was all stirred. It beat in her ears. She was shaken with it, and rebuked herself. Closing her eyes, she prayed. But there came no calm. Facts, yearnings, fears crowded upon her. She wanted this big thing for her child. Then she did not

want it. It was unknown. It was doubtful. It threw the future out of drawing. Yet a mother's hot ambition, below all, desired, yearned for it. If William— All at once she saw the white figure at the turn of the road, and instantly went inside again.

Her husband, in his cream-colored clothes with little brown straps below the knees of his trousers, handsome, square-set, red-headed, stood knocking the sticky mud off his boots before he stepped over the threshold. He lacked the curious, subtle distinction and character that belonged to his wife. But he was a fine man to look at, and a good workman, and glanced round the neat, comfortable place with a cool pride of possession. He meant to buy his house, as soon as there was a bit more put away.

Esther, putting a plate to warm, did not look at him.

“You be well to time, my dear.”

“Where ’s the youngsters?” the father said.

“Down to Granny’s, doin’ up her garden. Took their dinner. Yours ’ll be ready soon as you be.” He never sat down in quarry clothes of a Saturday. The loose linen jacket and old brown trousers made him a less striking figure, but a more comfortable. He had half satisfied his hunger before, fixing steady eyes on her, he said,

“What ’s up wi’ you, missus?”

Her eyes sought his silently. Theirs was a faithful marriage; though two troubled years, when both were young, had slowly taught her idealisms that the lover she had met at Mother’s favorite prayer-meeting was merely a working man of the usual flesh and blood. With the boy’s birth, its deep fears and dear hopes, she had learnt to prize his man’s strength;

and he had come nearer to understanding.

Across her jug of home-brewed—a compromise with his refusal to ‘take the pledge’—she looked to see how he would take her news.

“I ’ve got a big thing to speak about,” she said, not quite steadily.

“Eh?”

“ ’Tis a gentleman been here, from Oxford College. He come after—’t was him took our Dave out, that night as he were late for tea.” She paused. He eyed her inquiringly. “He do want for we to send Dave to Spetterton Free School: says as the child be out o’ common clever, and they ’d send ’n on t’ Oxford College, when he come up nineteen.”

Her husband read new and strange things in the brown eyes that he had never quite fathomed.

“Do thee want it?” he said.

“I don’ know if I do want it.” Her eyes showed her helpless yearning. “I do want—the Lord’s will for ’n, whatever ’t is. He ’d come up a gentleman. He ’ould n’t learn no bad words: nor none o’ that—” She ceased. Her lips were working, and she could not speak steadily. “Thee ’d have to stand out of ’s money. ’T is thee must say.”

William sat silent. He knew her; or believed he did.

“Thee do want it,” he said. A scarcely perceptible smile touched his lips. “Us can get along like we be; they ’ll give me a crane presently if I d’ ax for it.”

“Don’t thee be takin’ no risks,” she said seriously. The man who ‘had a crane’ paid so many men and held the profits, which in working a good seam might be considerable. They were silent, till she reached a white envelope from the mantel-shelf above them.

“He give me that for to give to the schoolmaster. Us did ought to see him, whether or no.”

“Frank Fletcher, Esquire,” he read aloud. “I’ve a-seen that place. ’Tis along the London road.” His eyes traveled to the clock.

“The carts ’ll be by, ’bout a half hour from now. Thee could get a lift in, and back wi’ carrier.”

She nodded. “Granny she ’d give them childern their tea; and us could go together. Else we ’ll have to bide till another Saturday.”

“I ’ll go down to Mother’s while thee gets theeself ready.”

“Don’t ee say nothing,” she cried quickly. “There might n’t nothing come of it. Tell ’em the carts is goin’ and we takin’ the chance. ’Tis true.”

He smiled again. She rose and stood looking round.

“What about thee buyin’ the house?” she said, suddenly.

“That ’ll be all right,” said William, solidly. Within, the instant pinched him. It was a cherished dream and had involved a second wage-earner. But when Esther wanted a thing, it was usually a weighty thing, a little above average, everyday desires. She usually had it—whether or no she realized the fact.

“Us ’ll go, then,” she said gravely, and opened the long brown door in the wall that hid the stairs.

The long procession of low, solid stone-carts with their heavy wheels left a broad track, steel-blue, where the big slipper-draggs steadied them down the long hill. On a great slab of broad creamy oolite, a ton and a half in weight, Mrs. Bold spread a shawl to save her best gown. William, beside, walked the long eight miles in the autumn sunshine.

That learned and wealthy gentleman, Sir Humphrey Nicholas of Compton Nicholas, in the second year of King Henry VII, set the clustered buildings of his "Free Schoole for all ye poore children of Compton and other good menns children," together with his Bede-house, in certain lands and tenements beside the river Combe: enfeofing three Fellows of Cuthbert's, Oxford, and others to the number of eight, "in a moiety of his Manor and in one mese and a toft *cum pertinentibus* lying without it." The College in return covenanted to keep in repair St. Margaret's Chapel and altar, where he had founded a chantry; to appoint the Chantry Priest, and to pay to him eight pounds per annum for keeping of the free-school; also to each of the eight poor men in the Bede-house ninepence per week, with three and fourpence yearly for a gown and two and threepence for fuel; the resi-

due of the rents being expended by the Warden and Fellows in exhibitions or otherwise at their discretion.

Thanks to his cautiously worded deed of Feoffment and to the persistence of his descendants in the Manor, the spirit of this good Knight presided, through troublous days and calmer, like a careful and far-seeing guardian, over his green riverside acres and thatched walls, now hoary and lichen-grown. When in mid-nineteenth century certain Commissioners came down from London with every intention of "loosing the dead hand of the Founder" from this comfortable bit of property, they found a flourishing and superior day-school, no longer free, on the outskirts of the thriving cloth-weaving town of Speterton, (a hamlet in 2 Henry VII), whereinto little Compton had been long since absorbed. Cuthbert's and Sir Humphrey's deed withstood them to their face

and won; for the school served the tradesmen class well, and the exhibitions were valuable. So the government of the place remained in the hands of the original eight trustees, who, dismissing the "poore men" to Flint's Almshouse, by Spetterton Parish Church, adapted their old abode to the uses of a new foundation of boarders.

The latest successor of the original Chantry Priest, a rubicund young layman of pleasing countenance, was playing tennis on his sixteenth-century turf, with some of his Sixth Form from the town, when the stone-cart stopped. Esther Bold's eyes took in ancient gateway and latticed windows, nodding sunflowers and gaudy dahlias in the old Bede-house garden, while William pulled the long chain under its little penthouse. A gawky young man in livery, who answered, threw open the door of a wainscotted hall, carrying off the Professor's letter: and they stood meekly wait-

ing, under the brooding gaze of the Founder's portrait by Holbein, which hung, deep-bearded and flat-hatted, above the high stone mantel.

The healthful and slightly perspiring presence of the Master in his clean modern flannels entered from a side door.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Bold. Come into my study, won't you?" He had shaken hands courteously with both, causing William to blush up to his hair. "I saw the Professor yesterday. We had a long talk about your boy. Our term begins in ten days. Yes, we have a jolly garden, haven't we? I expect you'd like to go round the place first." He had rung the bell. "Tea in half an hour, Clark. This way, Mrs. Bold." He led them on by long passages, up and down stairs, in and out of tiny chambers, and through deep, low classrooms fitted with old desks—in shocking repair, to Mrs. Bold's careful eye. They

followed, meek and monosyllabic, till they emerged again at length upon the bowling-green, where the lads were still at the interrupted game. The parents had gone through all the survey speechlessly; it seemed to them a sort of dream, scarcely half realized; Mr. Fletcher did all the talking, and found them "a bit heavy on hand." But on the stone bench under the study-window, Esther Bold became aware that she ought to speak. Her hands in their neat knitted gloves met in her lap: she steadied her soul for an effort.

"I 'm sure, sir, we be downright obliged. I 'd never thought as it could be that beautiful; and the beds and all, free gracious. 'Tis main good of the gentlemen. But surely, sir, our David bain 't fit. 'Tis all suitable to gentlefolks: and he but a poor boy; for all he knows his manners, like 'em should all be taught, as you knows, sir; and speak the truth, as he knows I 'd

pretty near die if he did n't; and hurt nobody by word or deed; and his lips is pure, sir,—please the Lord they keeps so."

Her subject had taken hold of her and she raised her eyes to the Master, who liked her very much.

"We have several," he said gently, "from—from schools like David's." He could not truthfully say "from homes like yours." Board School boys from the town were not like this one; and he knew it, though he had never been inside a country cottage. "They do very well. He will have one of the little Bede-house rooms you saw. One Saturday in the term, if you wish, he can come home till Sunday evening. Come indoors now, won't you?" For the sound of teacups came from within the study.

"He's a real nice young gentleman," Mrs. Bold opined gravely, as they turned from the gateway towards the shops and

the Anchor Inn, whence "Carrier" started, "for all I 'd looked to see somebody a bit more serious-like, and that. But I could kind o' trust him."

William nodded. At the bottom of his mind, he felt himself miles apart from the whole thing; in another world, his own of the quarry and the fields, whence he could not visualize this one. But certain facts had taken hold on him, among them the look and the voices of the lithe lads springing over the tennis-court. When he had thought a bit, he spoke.

"There 's a lot in book-learnin'. I 'd be doin' a lot better myself down quar' if I 'd had a bit more cypherin' and that. I 'd meant for he to learn the mensuration."

She assented gravely.

"Thee must turn it over and so must I, takin' the good Sunday. 'T is thee must settle it, my dear, 'cause o' the money."

"Did ought to put up wi' something,"

he said slowly, "for the boy to come up a gentleman."

His wife's beautiful eyes were turned on him: they were swimming in tears.

"'T is—'t is that I be feared on," Esther Bold said, with shaken voice. Then she controlled herself, going on quietly beside him, with her steady, rapid step. He was silent, vaguely wondering if you could ever be sure where you 'd have a woman.

They reached home a little after sundown, taking the short cut over the fields from the Plough, where 'Carrier' stopped. The door was open, and Emily ran out to take the parcels from Mother, who asked,

"Where 's Dave?"

"In the window there, wi' a book as come from Rectory. I got supper laid, Mother."

"That 's Mother's careful maid. Put 'em on the pantry shelf, my dear."

Esther had read, with a little stab, some-

thing she had come to know in the open childish face. She asked no other for her daughter than woman's world-old drama of dependence: but " 't would come hard on that poor child."

Monday afternoon had come. Esther sat alone by the fireside, darning, when her husband came in. "You be early, my dear," she said.

"I be. We 've a-finished up seam, and I 'ad a mind to come back home before the youngsters was in. I 've a-thought, Missus."

"You 'ave, then?"

"Yes. I 've a-thought. I 'll stand out o' the money, Missus. The boy shall have 's chance."

A quick trembling shook his wife; but her voice was quite steady.

"You be a good father, my dear. I 'ope as he 'll give it back."

William uttered a short sound—inarticulate, rough, emotional.

“Be goin’ to clean myself,” he remarked.

Esther Bold sat still by the fire, her hands on her lap, her heart aflame. She thanked God, and snatched the words back. She called upon him and the cry became praise. In the midst of it, she saw her boy’s head pass beyond the window.

Her son was growing that tall! He was beginning to have to stoop coming in at the door, like his father. The step down inside made the doorway shallow. Them smocks would have to go now! Fanny’s Albert would be glad of them, all but the one heirloom for Emily. Bless him! he had a comely face. Would it look the same in a month or two?

“Dave, you can wash your hands: and Emily, my dear, you mid fill the kettle. Father’s came home.”

The familiar world, the sound of her own voice and the kettle's, gradually became real again. But the inward argument went on. If the boy changed, whose fault would it be? If he didn't, a sort of miracle! God could work miracles. David ought to know by now what went before a fall.

"Father, your tea 's ready. Come, my dears."

William sat in the arm-chair of authority. The firelight danced on Esther's comely head, on the bright pewter teapot, on the boy over his hot toast, on Emily's round eyes above her teacup. Emily, having eaten her fill, was revolving in her heart the question of an adjournment with David to the wash-house; where, Monday being boiling-day, the copper fire was still alight. In summer they would run out among the trees behind the house. Mondays were far lovelier in autumn and win-

ter; when they meant the blue three-legged stool and the turned-up basket, beside the square, glowing mouth of the copper: the cob-nuts; the cold, bare boughs in the wind, beyond the little window; perhaps, the snow; the warmth within; and Dave's stories, endless, breathless! Emily knew no joy greater than that hour's. But, from the absence of talk—she knew Dave's "signs" as a careful farmer knows his heavens—she feared to-night his head was in that book. She washed the tea-things always. To-night, before she had touched them, her mother spoke, rather suddenly.

"Father, I think 't is time now for tellin' David what we been a-talkin' of."

The boy had gravitated instantly towards the dresser, where the brown book lay. He turned his face full of sudden question.

William Bold sat upright in his chair.

"You can tell 'em, Missus," he said.

When the children were concerned, he never was the chief speaker.

“Come here to me, David,” said Esther Bold. When she felt a thing deeply and anxiously, her tone and her face were never without a hint of sternness. The boy understood it. It only awed and excited him. He came and stood by her chair.

“David,—the Lord have looked upon thee. Father and me have got a girt piece o’ good luck come to us for thee, David.”

She paused, delaying, choking back she scarcely knew what, joy or fear.

“There ain’t a boy in this parish nor plenty more here round about, as ever come by the like. I hope you ’ll lay it to ee, David, and give the Lord back.”

“What, Mother?” David asked breathless. The room was shaking with Emily.

“Your gentleman what took ’ee out come here Saturday. He ’ve planned as you

should go to Nich'las Free School to Spet-terton. They be goin' to be wonderful good to 'ee there: and give 'ee book-learning all free gracious,—more 'n plain writin' and cypher. Latin and history-books and all sorts. Nor that ain't all."

The boy's bright eyes devoured her face.

"They says if Father can give up thoughts of you earning anything or doin' for yourself, they 'll keep ee come you be nineteen, and then send ee to Oxford College, for to see if the folks up there 'll take ee to instruct, like they does the gentlemen. This here school have got some sort of a hold upon Oxford College, as they 're bound to take a boy from there once a year. It mid be you, David."

The boy's breath came short and quick.

"You did ought to thank your father, David, as have made up his mind for to

stand out o' your money, and part keep ee 'isself for you t' 'ave such a chance."

David stepped across the narrow hearth.

"Thank ee, Father," he said in a high, excited, childish voice,—“be main good of ee, Father."

His mother caught her breath. The boy had taken it in.

Emily behind had stood looking on with scarlet cheeks. Her little soul, shaken and eager, was filled suddenly to overflowing with passionate pride. He was going to be seen for what he was! to do the marvels she had always known he could do! Now nothing could have restrained her. She sprang forward and caught David round the neck.

"Oh, Dave, Dave!" she cried out. "Oh Dave! I be that glad." Her pale eyes glowed and danced. No thought but of selfless joy was in the child.

The boy turned, caught her by the shoul-

ders and jumped with her up the room and back again. His cheeks were flaming: his eyes lit; he was a creature transformed; a boy no longer,—that dumb, conscious thing that is a boy.

The tears leapt up into Esther Bold's eyes. She was not a crying woman, but they blinded her.

As the dancing children came near her, she stretched a hand, rose, and arrested them, looking on them with eyes of fierce love, and shaking lips that for a long minute would not speak.

“My son,—when you be come up a gentleman, mind what your mother did say to you this night. Wherever you be and whatever you 've a-done, don't you never come ashamed o' your sister, David. She do love thee faithful.”

Book II
The Dead Hand

IV

DAVID'S box had departed early by the carrier: an ancient hair-trunk, which had gone with Granny Fielder and Mother to their first places. It was studded with elaborate designs, in brass nails which Emily rubbed to blazing point after the packing.

The entrance examination had resolved itself into written questions, imprisoning in an empty class-room, till five of a sunny afternoon, a David oppressed with a sense that his life depended on them.

In due course a letter came.

“Dear Mrs. Bold, I am glad to tell you that David has passed in. He should present himself here not later than five next Monday, when term begins. He will have

time to unpack and settle down before hall tea at six. Believe me faithfully yours, F. R. Fletcher."

The sheet bore a square stamp with a facsimile of the Holbein above the date 1487.

No one ate much dinner that Monday. Emily, mounting the narrow brown staircase from the kitchen, clad herself in the gray frock and white hat of Sunday. She was to walk to Spetterton with David, and return with the carrier. A fine instinct that she but half understood kept Esther Bold at home. She had kissed and solemnly blessed him, and David was ramming his new straw hat down on his head, when a diversion occurred in the form of Granny Bold, bustling up from the farm cottages, "one vast substantial smile."

"He do look smart! Granny 'ad to come and throw shoe after 'n! Here, sonny, lovely and ripe!" From a seem-

ingly limitless pocket came two huge and scarlet apples; after more diving also an old bag purse and a pierced "three-penny."

"Keep that and thee 'll have money. What, won't 'em go in thee pocket? Let I try."

"Here 's my basket," said Emily quickly. He was pernickety about that jacket! Granny with some noise embraced the departing hero. With a twitch of the boyish mouth, he held up his face silently again to Mother.

"Don't 'ee fret after 'n, my dear." Granny came in from the gate. "Come down my place, or sh' I stop a bit and help with thee sewing?"

"I have n't no call to fret," said Esther gravely. "I 'm sure you got plenty sewing, Mother. Mine 's most done."

The pair went soberly down the hill. Crossing the stile, where the vale showed

distant chimneys, David pointed. "There 's where I be goin'." His face was full of new things.

"I wish as I could see ee there," said Emily slowly.

"They don't have no girls," he replied gravely, well aware that hers was the reverse of the shield.

"If 'em did, I ain't sharp enough. Nor Mother could n't spare me till I goes to place."

"'Tis like as if we had to go different ways." He spoke with a gravity like his mother's. "But 'tis just the same, really."

She nodded, swallowing deep in her throat. "To be sure 'tis," she said, stoutly, "and thee 've never finished telling up about that old man in the book."

Sitting on the last stile they slowly disposed of Granny's apples. The short cut brought them past the tall white hospital

and down into the town about half-past three. They visited Mother's shops and deposited Emily's basket in the high white-covered carrier's cart. Then under the old inn's archway they kissed simply and parted; a pair of children "going different ways."

Emily turned towards the shelter of a friend's back-parlor where she was to get her tea: she neither cried nor consciously grieved: she only felt cold all over and very silent. The child-soul hates the irrevocable.

David, turning from the inn, was glad to mount back to the lane between bramble brakes, that ran towards the west; streets have always an untrusted strangeness to the country-bred.

On the high road at right angles that went traveling over the hill to London between golden trees and broad green margins, the boy stood still—a small, lonely

figure, with lifted head, scenting the air of the future.

The town, set with two tapering spires and many factory-chimneys, lay beneath its faint haze of smoke, below. Beyond it, his own wide vale and blue hills met the horizon line.

On the hither side, the hill dropped to fields and lines of willows, the green outskirts of the town. A cluster of gray buildings, irregularly roofed with a delicate mingling of brown thatch and old, mellow, red tiles, stood back from the broad road. A golden sun bathed the place in the mellow peace of his sinking; warm upon gabled gateway and quaint, hooded bell-turret and long lines of small, twinkling window-panes. Beyond, the road ran on, rising over a long, high-shouldered ancient bridge, to the gray and misty town.

The boy on the hill knew that he looked

at his home-to-be, home in a new and unknown fashion, yet in truth and already his spirit's home. It had not yet struck him to be frightened of a new life or unrealized comrades. An unconscious courage came to him with his cottage blood. One thing only mattered. He was going to "get learning." The heart within him swelled: as he felt and felt, with some part of him whose full use he did not yet know, after a new, mysterious glory of life. Broughton Priors, Emily, the cottage just over the hill, were worlds away; himself suddenly years older. We are at our youngest with our mother. And he knew not yet the saving truth that no one is ever the same age all over him.

From the quiet place a musical, quavering clock chimed half-past four. David went gravely down the hill towards his fate. The little wicket in the large door opened. A solid man in porter's livery,

red-badged on the sleeve, let him pass in. The man looked the boy over with an experienced eye.

“Which ’ll you be?”

“David Bold.”

“Any of that yours?”

David looked at a miscellaneous pile of luggage in the opposite corner, and picked out Phyllis Fielder’s hair-trunk as in a dream.

“I ’ll give you a hand with it presently. You can come along in the lodge, now and write your name. Your things is there.”

Wondering what they might be, David followed into a warm, square little room with a small iron door high up in the wall. On a desk a large leather-bound book stood open; the long yellow page was headed:

“Sir Humphrey Nicholas’ School and Bede-House. Roll of Foundation Scholars.”

“Your name there; age here; father’s

name and address here. Try the pen first. Can you spell it all?"

David replied, with inward offense. He had always known how to spell: but he observed that the last boy had written "Edward" with three d's. The solemn inditing in round text of his own description brought him a sense of gravity and fate.

The porter took an object from a chair-back and held it up smiling. A long garment of black serge, the shape and like of which David never had beheld.

"'Tis your gown," he answered the astonished eyes. "You haves it on to go in to the Master. Slip into it. I reckon it's a bit long."

The strange feel of deep folds about his legs made David but half conscious of the odd, flat cap that his guide thrust into his hand. "You bring 'em back here, and fetch 'em again ten minutes to eight; after

that you goes on wearing 'em. Come along to the study; put your cap on."

"David Bold, sir," the porter announced, throwing open the door beyond gateway and dim hall.

David was too much absorbed in his clothes to have thought what he would see. The low window of a pleasant room lined with pale blue wainscot stood open to the bowling-green; a young, upright woman was pouring out tea for the Master, who lounged smoking in an arm-chair.

"Ah! Come in, boy. Cap fit?"

"Yes, to be sure," said the lady, looking at David with eyes that might have been embarrassing, had not the mirror over the mantel seized his own.

"'Tis never I!" He was unconscious that any one heard.

The long black lines that fell to his feet bore a broad edge of red; the cap a red tassel; his left breast a square brass badge

repeating the Holbein stamp, surmounted by a large red B and a figure of 4.

“What ’s that for, please?” cried the quick childish voice.

“Bedesman Four: that number is on your room. The gentleman on the badge is your Founder.”

“For whose soul,” said the lady, in her deep voice, “you are ever bound to pray.”

“Does he live here?” said David eagerly. She only smiled.

“Shall he have a piece of cake, Frank?”

“I think he ’d better wait for his own tea. Going, Dolly?” He crossed to open a glass door beyond the window. “I ’ll come over after supper, if I can.”

“A picture of a child,” his sister said, too low for David’s ears.

The Master, coming back, glanced at the clock. “You and I will go and see your room. At school prayers you ’ll be formally admitted. After that, come to this

door and knock, and we 'll have a chat."

Through the still open garden door they reached another creeper-hung entrance, and a flight of stairs with black broad banisters, scratched with many names.

"Here you are."

They stood in a low chamber, whose latticed window filled the length of one wall. The floor was bare; the room provided with a row of pegs, a gas-jet, three shelves, a worn table on heavy black legs, and two high-backed wooden chairs. An odd piece of furniture between a school desk and a chest of drawers stood across the open chimney. The small place, black-wainscoted more than half way up, gave a curious impression of space. A coat of arms in faded reds and blues was blazoned above the hearth. A late-blowing rose thrust two creamy blooms in at the window.

"This is your own place, where you do your work out of school: you can ask fel-

lows in, within rules. Here 's your bed," said the Master, pushing back a sliding panel in the wall; "you wash in the lavatory off the stairs. You wear your cap to go into the town, about the place here only your gown. You 've three neighbors, Martin, Scraggs, and Willis: four down below. You 're the eight Bedesmen, who come in by Trustees' nomination; this is the old Bede-house. Through that passage-door, see, the other foundationers live."

David nodded. He was not in the least interested in the other foundationers.

The Master departed with a kindly nod.

Left alone, half of David went out of the window. The bowling-green lay enclosed by a quadrangle of irregular buildings, the hooded bell-turret rising from a tiled roof at one end: the other closed by a tall close-clipped yew hedge. Opposite him, where other roofs dropped to a second and smaller gateway, he could see fields and

willows; between them a steel-blue glimpse of river reflecting a crimson sun. The place lay empty, and all the view seemed his own, till approaching voices made him withdraw within his own domain, which instantly took possession of him. At last a steady, rapid bell began to ring and he ran down. Following the little troop of boys traveling towards the building under the bell-turret, he found himself standing at a short table across two long ones, with six gowned figures at whom he did not venture to look. Somebody said something sonorous and incomprehensible; a loud clatter of cups and voices began. David found himself hungry enough: but the unknown noise confounded him; he shivered: the scene was utterly strange; he began to understand that he was one of fifty, and scarcely found courage to look up till a dig in the left side caused him to start round.

“Hullo, Four, are you a deafy?

What 's your name?" The head above the far from clean gown was sandy and rubicund: the amused eyes not unfriendly. David drew breath. It was only another boy.

"I can't but half hear what you 're saying. Bold 's my name." He lived to thank such guardian powers as suppressed the David.

"I 'm Two: next door to you. I 'm a bird-stuffer and I play the cornet."

"Why should n't you?" said David, seeing an answer was expected.

"Three has got the measles; won't be back for a fortnight, the ass."

A general rising and dispersal broke off these enlightening details. The neighbor linked arms with one opposite, observing: "Well, Toads, how 's your old self?" and David regained his room with satisfaction.

At ten minutes to eight o'clock when Granny Fielder's trunk, empty, had been

carried to the box-room, the same bell rang. The same hall was bright with lights, the half-hundred boys ranged along the walls. The porter bearing David's gown and cap stood beside him at the end of the row of Bedesmen. A homelike evening hymn brought a lump into the new boy's throat; but the day's Psalms were followed by prayers, whose curious language stirred his imagination. Then the porter motioned him to stand forward in the midst. The gowned Master on the platform addressed him by name, filling him with an instant's thrill of terror. He had read most of what followed on a soiled square card, taken from a nail on the lodge wall and still held tight in both hands; but it all sounded quite new.

“David Bold,—

“Sir Humphrey Nicholas of good memory directeth for his honor and credit that his Bedesmen and Scholars be of honest

and virtuous conversation, that they haunt not taverns, neither play at unlawful games of cock-fighting, cards, nor dice-tables, neither carry any weapon invasive to fight nor brawl withal: and that the Scholars be submiss and obedient to the Master in all things touching good manners and learning. All this wilt thou observe and keep?"

David looked Mr. Fletcher full in the face.

"All this," said a clear, rustic, childish voice, "I will observe and keep."

Then the Master, having clad the neophyte in gown and cap, bade him,

"Kneel thee down."

"*Admitto te,*"—the strong male voice went on. The boy, gripping his card, followed in the English parallel column to the end of the "*Dominus custodiat.*" He had forgotten the public place, even the watching boys. His eyes swam. He did not

understand the still, solemn elation that thrilled him. But it is not definite understandings that feed the soul.

When he reached the study-door, the place was full of boys hand-shaking, but the Master cried, "Come in, Bold," and presently, the room having cleared, the boy found himself sunk in a deep chair by the empty grate.

"Like it, eh?" the Master asked with a whimsical smile.

"I likes it very well, please, sir," said David squarely, with eager eyes.

"You 'll like it better to-morrow when games begin—"

David's face clouded for an instant. He spoke with a touch of scorn.

"I do want to get learning. I can play about between times."

The Master smiled again.

"In a week's time you 'll think games are work, too. We are n't all head, like the

turnips. We 're legs, and arms. Got any fists, by the way?"

David laughed out and held them up. He was not in the least afraid of this gentleman, whose humor he relished. The 'jaded schoolmaster mind' acutely relished him. Not often did Frank Fletcher meet the child still in the boy.

"If any one plagues you," he observed gravely, "it 's cheaper in the end to use those at once."

For an instant David looked sharply terrified. Then memories of one Bill Robbins relieved his mind. "All right, sir," he observed, with an odd dryness.

"So. You 'll do. Now let 's talk about your books."

"Martin," Mr. Fletcher put his head out of the study, and captured the sandy-haired bird-stuffer. "Your new Bedesman 's a country lad and innocent. Keep an eye on him, eh? when they begin to find it out."

The gas went out suddenly as the clock struck. A broad, oblique streak of moonlight leaped into sight across the dark boards. Gradually silence fell. The low wind whispered in the creeper. The voice of an owl came from the fields where the river ran.

David Bold lay on his back in the box-bed, where generations of Bedesmen, old and then young, had lain before him.

As the quiet chime spoke again, his lids began to fall.

“Pray God take care of me all night,” murmured Esther Bold’s son.

He turned on his side, but for a long while was awake for sheer happiness; and the keen relish of a new world, and of the future.

Over the hill at Broughton Priors, a little girl cried herself to sleep. Showers come on at nightfall.

V

DAVID always remembered with an odd distinctness the Friday morning in the third week of school when he seemed to wake from a wild and exciting dream,—once more a normal, though a different, human being. Till then he had constantly pursued his life and never caught it up.

At a queer, compact desk in a sunny class-room, he was ending an elementary Latin exercise with a fierce and joyful application of blotting-paper. The peasant mind does not take kindly to new languages. It has too limited a hold on that single one which it calls its own. The room had emptied three minutes back, but David waited by the master's desk. He liked the calm, unfathomable remarks of

the small, misshapen man who looked at his exercise.

“You don’t care for Latin, Bold—would n’t have written that—or that. You ’re not careless.”

“By times I am, sir, when I wants to get done.”

“No. To get to something else. (‘I wants’ is a false concord.) A whole man does n’t make favorites of his subjects. You ’re learning to live, not to scrap up knowledge.”

“You can’t help living,” came with a touch of scorn from David’s deep puzzlement, “you can help learning. The more part of them does.”

“I can’t contradict you.” Mr. Tithe-ridge hitched his gown on to his queer high shoulder. “You ’ll come to see many things, Bold, unless you shut your nose inside a book,—then you ’ll just see cob-webs.”

Mr. Titheridge liked this rustic boy, who was n't afraid of him; and limping off on his tall-soled left boot, left his pupil to the task of digestion. It was an hard saying: he could not yet hear it. Yet it waked him up: he suddenly knew he had to take hold on himself, to face the racing current. For a sharp, illuminant instant, he wondered if himself were the one thing worth taking hold on. Then, passing out into the kind sunshine, he relinquished what he thought a conceited idea. The chimes were announcing noon. The scurry of living by unfamiliar, inexorable hours, a deep countryman shyness, and the joys of new learning had hitherto caused David's human surroundings to be as shadows: Martin with his blaring trumpet; the wise face of little Botley in the next desk, piloting one through early whirlpools; a day-boy, with a tall, small head,—all were as figures seen in the twilight. To-day, facts were

round him: the border dahlias flamed with color: figures were individuals. Especially he realized the slim, blue-clad person of Miss Fletcher crossing the green, her arms full of books—which Flora, her brother's growing St. Bernard, a large and slobbering infant anxious to lick her face, sent on to the grass in a cascade.

"Let I have her, miss," cried David, startled out of a growing regard for his pronouns.

"Oh, thank you: but don't try to pick up the books too," as the teething Flora, going about seeking what she might devour, struggled towards a bound Browning.

"You're Bold, aren't you?" Miss Fletcher said. Flora disposed of, they were seeking each book's gap in the library shelves together. "Will you come to tea with me on Sunday at five? I often have boys then."

"Thank you kindly, miss," said David,

slightly alarmed. In his former dream, he had known she lived across the green, and that certain girlish figures, thronging parts of the playing-fields in dark blue skirts and scarlet sashes, represented a department over which she presided.

On Sunday, mindful of Mother, he brushed his gown, removed some layers of ink-stain from his fingers and crossed to the gateway opposite his window. On the bright strip of garden, before a harmonious modern building adjoining the old, a graceful bay window looked, showing a white table within. Miss Fletcher's voice cried, "This way!"

In a charming room, sparsely but daintily furnished, four girls in fresh Sunday frocks were gathered, with a couple of foundationers and the tall day-boy.

David's home eyes dwelt with satisfaction on the girls; at sight of other boys a paralyzing shyness gripped him.

A brown-eyed maiden called Bridget supplied him with beautiful cakes and somewhat serious conversation, but looked as if she could laugh. Being still quite a natural person, David was neither awkward nor wanting in an archaic code of manners descended from Granny Fielder. But she found him extremely bashful and his country accents strange, though his young, striking head gave her pleasure. After tea, a rather serious feast,

“The Mistress has just got this lovely book,” said Bridget producing a fascinating reprint of Mallory.

Despite the approach of the tall day-boy, her brother, the tongue of Bedesman 4 was loosed by the first grave and glowing picture. His bright eyes met Bridget’s: his grammar fled to the four winds. When at the sound of a bell, he had gone reluctant away, and brother and sister turned homewards, Bridget opined:

“That country boy ’s very intelligent; and not a bit like the town ones. He ’s got all his knowledge in different places.”

“You ’re awfully sharp about a chap,” said Ned approvingly from the air above her.

When they met again, David no longer dwelt with his neighbors as though they existed not: but had found a tardy gratitude for Botley, and drawn dismal howls from the cornet. From a righteous battle with one Briggs, large and lump-headed, he emerged,—thanks to William Bold’s quarryman arms,—bruised, but purged of fears.

On a golden late October Saturday, “day-boys’ holiday” and the week’s jewel, the fields called to him; and half-past three found him consuming partially ripe cob-nuts on a stile near the river.

Descending to let a couple cross, he was face to face with Ned and Bridget.

“Which way are you going?”

“I don’t but half know.”

“Come with us round Frimley Wood,” the girl said.

She wore a white blouse, a skirt and knitted cap of golden brown, the color of her eyes, and went on with rapid, quiet steps beside her brother, whose small, clever head was perched, above his low flannel collar, on an elongated throat. His tall legs traveled somewhat loosely. Burton was no good at games.

They went on together,—the first squirrel chased and held by David that Bridget might study his wise, alarmed countenance, making them fast friends. Burton had always been interesting, but Bridget had the unique charm of the comrade-woman.

“I did n’t know there ’d be girls,” David said, “my sister ’d give her eyes to come for all she is n’t sharp.”

“We ’re foundationers, too,” said Brid-

get proudly, "Sir Humphrey left six pounds a year for the Mistress, and a pair of white wool stockings at Christmas for each girl, at one shilling per pair. We get the shilling! The Mistress thinks he was ever so much before his age. She 's all for co-education."

"What 's that?"

"Boys and girls together. She says she could claim to-morrow to share your classrooms and work together. But she and the Master think we 'd keep each other back; through not needing things in the same shapes. I wonder if they 're right. I get along twice as fast when I work with Ned."

David reflected. "I don't want the Founder to be—kind of a prophet," he said, not knowing what words were coming till they came, "it makes him—not real-like."

Bridget looked at him curiously.

“What ’s your best subject?”

“History,” said David promptly.

She nodded. “So ’s mine. The Mistress is running me for Oxford scholarships. I ’m in luck, being under her.”

“So am I; the Professor sent me. Can girls go to Oxford?”

“You really might have heard of women’s colleges. Dad’s keen about them. You know who he is? The architect that designed the new class-rooms. Grandfather did that first awfully good bit, in ’85, and Dad has developed the idea.”

“You live here, then?”

“In Church Square, for generations. Ned, which way are we going home?” (Ned jerked his long neck towards the right.)—“Have n’t you seen the chapel, St. Margaret’s, where the Founder’s buried—where we go to church on Founder’s day? You Bedesmen should,” the girl said seriously; she found in her an odd motherli-

ness for this bright-eyed creature, short of the right words yet full of frank curiosity.

The wood-path led to a green meadow, where, retired and overhung by golden trees, a small, calm, gray building faced them. Its old greenish bell filled a little round-headed archway. The nail-studded door's flat, iron handle-ring lifted a large, worn, wooden bolt. Within, a scent as of a still place, ancient and faintly damp, rested on the quiet air. There were no seats, save a few stacks of rush-bottomed chairs in a corner. The irregular floor seemed made of worn, inscribed stones. Behind the low altar, hung with a breadth of dim brocade, and bearing flowers, one realized a draped half-wall; the east wall stood beyond a deep gap. Its high, greenish window showed figures in worn coloring, hard to make out.

Bridget touched a David silent and at gaze; who, following her to a wrought-iron

wicket, reached the space beyond the shrine. South of the east window, a canopied table-tomb rose from floor to barrel-roof. The sculptured knight wore a doctor's gown, his feet upon a couchant mastiff; his quiet lady's gentle and youthful head, in a close coif, pointed and pearl-bordered, rested like his on a fringed pillow. To the boy's young eyes they seemed to lie very still.

"Four daughters and three sons; they were the second wife's." Bridget spoke low, pointing to the mounting and meeting rows of small gowned figures below. "See the dead baby up in the sky. She died when he was born,—the year we were founded. I'm afraid he's rather like a caterpillar." But David scarcely smiled.

"Bid," said Ned's voice, "come here. I don't believe Dad looked at this corbel."

When they were out in the sunshine again, David said:

“Be the Statutes writ down?” and then flushed at his grammar.

“To be sure. The Master’s got them, and they’re in a book of Dad’s, too. Of course, we can’t keep them all nowadays.”

“No,” said David, slowly. “They did n’t take my knife from me. I offered the Master, for all ’t was my Granfer’s. Nor I never seen a dice-table.”

“See, you’ve got till six. Come home to tea, and you could see the book.”

The factory-quarter of Spetterton lay to the north-east. The Parish Church with its low tower, retired in a wide graveyard, filled one side of the deep, irregular square, Flint’s Almshouse another. The Burton’s house was white and solid; three steps rose from the street to the serious door sheltered by a round stone projection. The windows were tall, and heavily framed. The long, low, cozy room at the

back had three, with deep seats looking on a walled garden. The carpet was worn; all the furniture old and much of it quaint; the table strewn with books and parts of a blue linen blouse that Bridget was making with a hand sewing-machine. Under one window a desk had a great book open upon it, from which some one was minutely copying an architectural drawing—apparently Ned, who sat down to it instantly. The girl rang and an elderly woman in spotless apron but no cap, with a thimble on her finger, appeared.

“Tea, is it? Dear, Miss Bridget, don’t fling your cap down there; and clear up them pieces, else you ’ll lose ’em. The Master ’s just come in.”

“All right, old Nan. Bring some honeycomb, bless you. This is Mr. Bold. I ’m going for Dad.”

Her chattering voice came back up the stairs, and she came in hugging the arm of

a gray-headed man in riding-breeches. It transpired that he had been visiting Broughton Priors Church, in connection with a new vestry; and David's eager eyes brought questions and frank replies. The four sat round a generous table, Bridget pouring out tea. Father and children bandied family jokes, but the guest never felt "out of it"; it seemed to him he had never seen three people so fond of one another. The one drawback was that he could not understand all they said. He liked them as he liked no one save the Professor; as though he were of one world with them. That he was for the first time in a 'gentleman's' house as an equal did not matter. When at half-past five, Bridget told him frankly that he ought to go, his face fell: he wanted a thing so much that the girl saw.

"Dad, may he see that book with the Statutes in it?"

David's eyes shone: but he cast a distraught glance at the clock.

"Can you take care of a book?" Mr. Burton smiled.

"I 'll *strive* to," the boy said earnestly. It was his mother's word.

.
"And I woll that the sayde Preest of my Chantry be a discrete man and able of connyng to teache Gramer: And I woll that he sing his Masse and say his other Divyne Service at the aulter of my Chapell of St. Margarette in ye Parishe of Compton. and to pray specially for the soules, etc. And I woll that he kepe a Gramer School in the faier Howse therto by me ordained and that he frely without any wages or salarye except only my Salarye hereunder specified shall teche all maner persons children unto the tyme that they be convenably instrut in Gramer by hym after their capacities that God woll geve them: And I woll

that the same connyng and discrete Preest, with all the sayd children his scolers and with myn eight Bedesmen, shall one day in every weke that is upon Saturday come into the sayd Chapell, unto the place of the grave ther where the bodyes of my wyff Dame Margaret and my Fader and my Mother lyen buryed and ther say togiders the Psalm of De Profundis, with the versicles and colletts thereto accustomed after Salisbury use, and pray specially for the soule of my so dear wyf and for my soule and the soules of my Fader and Mother and for all Christen Soules: And once a year that is on St. Margaret's Day in ye afternoon to say the Dirigay and Comandasonay—"

David lifted his chin from his hollowed palms, and, sighing, rubbed his hands over his ears. What on earth was the Comandasonay?

The shadows lengthened and deepened

in the little wainscotted Bedesman's chamber; and with them the new dream gathered closer round, the dream that was calm and real, no one's made-up tale, but true. He gazed up at the faint blazoning above the hearth. As he bent his head again the fusty scent of the old book came up, exciting him to the depths of his soul like some new wine.

“And the same connyng Preest shall teche the children his Scholers to say Grace as well at dinner as at supper also he shall teche them good maners and specially to refrain from lieing to honoure their parents and serve God devowtely in hys Church. And every Scholar shall be at the saide School in the mornynge by seven of the Clocke and at the tyme of his firste admyting and writing of his name in the boke of Scolers—”

Slowly the gentle dusk was creeping between the eager eyes and the old blunt

print, the queer spellings. Reluctant, as one breaking a spell, David rose to kindle his gas. With the starting jet, the dark lines of wainscot and the books and the gown upon the door peg leaped to sight. His eyes clung to the straight-hanging red-bordered garment. His soul grew aware, as though some dawning light broadened and glowed. That firm, un-stirring hand, that relaxed not, had first taken hold in the year of grace 1487, when America was yet to be, the quiet hand of a bearded Englishman, Doctor of Laws in the University of Oxford: who in a heart-rending hour desired that those after him, living truly, should also call upon God for a sweet soul gone hence and no more seen. He lived still: still his words had power; still his bounty gave to craving, eager souls the jewel of learning, set in the sound gold of a fair tradition.

Where did one find the *Psalm of De*

Profundis? Bridget would know—Tomorrow was Sunday. David had dropped back into his chair. The Past, most alive of all things, had gripped him again. For this Bedesman was of his own nature Hers for good. Till now he had not known it.

Turning a handful of leaves, he lost himself among the elaborate provisions of the pious and cleanly Dean Colet, and of one Peter Blundell—a clothier of “Tyverton in Devon,” who, with his love for “floores well-plancked with plancks of oke” and for “faire greate chimneys,” had apparently known how to be comfortable.

VI

“**D**ON'T ee go furder 'n Frankley turning, my dear. Thee mid miss him.”

“He 'll be sooner 'n that, Mother.” The gate swung behind Emily. In her round and simple countenance “large mornings shone.”

Esther Bold went back to her mending. But the drama of her daughter lay at her heart. Time, bringing new things, weans a childish heart from the old. After eight weeks Emily was still unweaned. She had flagged, drooping to a lonely look: “seeking to” her mother, till Esther was ashamed to rejoice in a new friendship born of the child's new pain. But the boy—he was sure enough to have traveled on. His mother's heart shook, there. She put

away her basket. It was wiser to stir about, till the two chattering voices, approaching on the road, caught her back to a time that was gone. Her eyes swam. Then he was in the room. Two vigorous arms had her round the neck. Grown! To be sure he was. That was the "good living." And—he had a look—smarter? was it only that? He looked round with eager eyes; seeing everything new. "Seems all different somehow," he said slowly, as Emily's foot climbed the stair.

"Our chairs—Mother, they 're just like them in my room. You did ought to see my room: 't is pretty near 's big as this: the window 's longer. There 's pipes. But 't is cozier with the fire. And 't is—"

Suddenly he nestled to her, and she knew she meant the heart of home: he was always a coaxing one from a baby. "Thee be just the same," he said in her ear.

"Thee mother don't change. She ain't

young like thee. Be happy there, child?"

"Rare and happy. 'Tis lovely." A slow smile broadened. He was still, warm against her, staring at the fire.

"I 'm getting learning," he said in a low voice, not free from awe, "more every day. Mr. Titheridge he can teach."

"Don't Mr. Fletcher?"

"Not till you get in the Sixth. Master, he rules, back of everything, so as you feels lovely and safe. Mother—"

"Well?"

"Our Founder were good to us. Mother—do thee say prayers for—them that 's dead?"

Esther Bold was brought up short. She paused, seeking the deeper truth.

"They—be safe, my dear: not but what I often thinks—on Mother and them. Seems like Mr. Richards he holds with it,—if 't was n't some o' them antics, like they say he haves."

“’Cause Founder said to go to my lady’s grave. ’Tis Psalm 130. I found it in the Prayer-book. Damer her name was, Mother: like the Bolds and the Fielders worked for, far-back times.”

Here Emily entered. As he watched her set the tea:

“Sis, have a brown frock, your next; ’tis awful pretty.”

“What do thee know?” Emily laughed.

“I can see. Bridget she wears it and cap to match. The girls *do* come; to Miss Fletcher, t’other side. Bridget’s got a brother a day-boy. I been to tea there.”

Whoever Bridget was, Emily did not care about her.

“Mother, sh’ I fetch in a bit more wood?” David said.

She was so pleased that she felt ashamed. “Take off thee jacket first,” she answered calmly.

Out at the back door, the bright North

wind fluttered David's pink shirt sleeves, as, a village lad again, he loaded his arms with sticks. Standing still for a minute, he scented the breeze through the fir-trees. He felt "queer," shaken, as though he were not sure who he was. Home had gathered him to its warm arms; but it was "different somehow." It did not mean all of him: and it had grown smaller. Glancing away, he saw the white figure of his father turning the corner. David went in. Somehow he preferred to have his jacket on when Father came in. He suddenly knew that part of the "difference" in things was in his feeling about his father. Why? Mother was just the same—more so.

At tea, he knew the male eyes watched him. William Bold, who wished his son to "come up a gentleman," found he did not relish all the signs that his desire began to be fulfilled. His wife knew it. She talked

to the children: but the boy had turned suddenly silent, almost shy. He went with Emily to the scullery, to wash the tea things. Sisterly eyes knew he had not been at ease. Emily hated his correcter language, after the old rough-hewn speech. The last cup put away, he spoke, and her heart leaped. "Us 'll have a run, Sis." Out of the back door and down the slope they scooted, bare-headed both, till at the stile they stopped for breath: leaning against it, panting, laughing. He pushed a flying lock behind her ear.

"Miss me, Sis?"

The round, simple face quivered.

"Course I does." He saw it all clearly.

"See here,"— he spoke quickly, "when I 'm on my own, us 'll live together, Sis, you and me. You shall see to the house, and I 'll be studding and reading,—writing, most like—" he paused and his eyes widened.

“Thee ’ll get married then,” said Emily sedately.

“I shan’t want no wife, if I got thee. I wonder—if I was to write—”

The pause was long; Emily’s eyes grew imploring. He roused himself, looking towards the west. “We got time to go up in the wood before ’t is dark,” he said.

In the little chamber at the top of the stairs with the three-quarter door, where his white bed had received him each night since the baby became the boy, where the birds talked under the thatch till you fell asleep, he lay to-night, wide-eyed, hearing Emily’s soft breaths beyond the wooden partition. He was queerly aware of an empty box-bed in the valley beyond the hill, where a slow chime told the quarters. This little room had a closed-in feeling and was cold, though he loved to be in it. The spotless sheets smelt of wood

smoke. Drying-day had been wet. Over the evening fire, a joke of his father's had loosed his tongue and there had followed long, long tales, and pourings-out. Now how strange it all looked! To-morrow—back again, to lessons, to play, no one there aware of this other world that was “home,” himself deep in the intense interests, the passionate “learning”—

Could one really be two people? He was.

On Sunday, after afternoon church, they walked all together to Frankley turning, and the three watched the one over the hill's brow. Going home, Emily lagged behind.

“He be a lot come on,” said William.

“I believe,” his mother said, slowly, “as he 'll stop the same boy.”

“To be sure, will,” his father said, not without a hint of puzzlement.

Book III
Denial

VII

THERE came an April morning, warm and sunny. Through Church Square a quiet and cheerful traffic rattled on its way. "Spetterton's Grandfather," the giant elm, whose massy trunk was surrounded by irregular seats; and all the churchyard sycamores and limes, had clothed themselves in tender and transparent greens. In the warm, walled garden behind number 17, a fragrant place, vivid colors flamed softly.

The front door and the garden door opposite it stood open; so that a tall boy, arriving on the top step and glancing through, saw as the center of a glowing, spring-like picture, a girl, trim and workmanlike in a blue overall, who seemed to be

dealing a trifle masterfully with an elderly, shirt-sleeved gardener.

The boy walked coolly through the house, and, smiling, descended the old curved garden steps and deposited at their foot certain soundly-tied paper parcels. Then he stood looking on. Yes. She *was* like that, this friend of his. As if no one could be enough alive! Hear her!

“No, Sparks—then I must begin again. The iris-bed—”

The working man’s quiet eyes dwelt on her with a fatherly smile and a patient nod. Not till he had retired with large slow steps to a far-off corner did Bridget turn, and, pushing back her sun-bonnet, realize the new-comer.

“David! That’s good! Why I just wanted your mind on the tulips. But—what’s that? *not* the love-in-a-mist from your mother?”

“She tied it up with some other bits of

things. There 's a creeper, red-flowering, my aunt sent her from Cornwall: but it 's a bit faddy. Have you got a cozy corner to the north? Let me undo it and we 'll put them in."

"Your mother," said Bridget, with conviction, "must be a jewel. Oh, boy! cut it! My knife 's just sharpened."

"She is, rather, but she don't let you cut string," said the boy, with a quaint gentleness. "Here 's the creeper, see. Where shall the lavender go?"

Half an hour's busy work left them resting on the seat beside the old pear-tree, warm and full of words.

"What have you done with your holidays? Got on with Froude? I 'm half way through vol. III."

"How a girl does race at things! I have been going over and over that first chapter. I could n't leave it. But now I 've finished vol. I. Most of the time I 've been out

of doors. I 've dug up our garden and my grandmother's: and done a good few other things."

"Have n't I told you 'a good few' is bad style? Can't you see it's almost nonsense?"

"Why not? Plenty nonsense words are rare good to use. I find them every day. You take a first-rate book and count—"

"My blessed boy, don't argue. I'm merely taking an interest in your English style. Ah—what are you thinking about?"

David looked down between his feet, silent but unembarrassed, though her eyes dwelt on him. Like most of her male friends—all her life they were many—he understood Bridget. Perhaps, as with one Beatrice, "Adam's sons were her brethren." She was David's closest friend. But he had a thing at his heart, deep, moving. Only slowly, he knew that you

do not keep a big thing back—from the friend.

“Master gave out prize subjects this morning,” he said.

“Well—?”

“Well—the essay ’s decent. ‘This place in the Founder’s day.’ ”

“*David!* Mistress put that into his head, I know!”

“No. It was some old lady up at the Hall, just come. He told me so.”

“Not my godmother! Did he say Miss Nicholas?”

“Miss Nicholas! No.”

“Founder’s heir. She ’s come back then! And we thought she ’d let it for good.”

“Well, she ’ll be giving the prizes,—or else some learned friend of hers. That last big-wig—ass on his hind legs, was n’t he?”

“Rather. Did you send in, then?”

“Yes. I made a poor job. I shan’t this time.” He sat gazing before him, silent, at a gorgeous tulip-bed. She watched him with softened eyes.

“You won’t. Suppose it were the beginning?”

He gave one quick nod, and a wise woman arrived at the holding of her tongue. She rose and went to root a weed from the tulip-bed. He said, as to himself: “Good to begin already.” Bridget came back.

Sitting down she smiled, picking up a corner of his Bedesman’s gown that lay on the seat between them. The porter’s wife had lately let it down to within the last inch of its liberal turning.

“Your own subject,” she said. “I’ve never known another but you that cared to walk about Spetterton in this. Boys are such self-conscious loonies!”

He lifted his head as with offense. "There's graceless fellows in every school."

"Oh, come! It's just want of imagination."

"If you choose to give smart names to ugly things. You think what they owe him!"

"Yes, but if you're a born idiot,—why, you are! You can't expect things centuries old to appeal to them, because they appeal to you."

He rose with a quick movement and stretched his arms above his head.

"I must go, Bridget, or be late for hall. I'll come one day, and talk it over, and see how that creeper's doing."

"Do. Dad might have some books. Oh, David—"

He turned.

"I want to thank your mother. Why

should n't you and Ned and I ride over on Saturday? Dad would lend you his old bicycle."

David paused. That jewel of his lay close against his heart.

"I 'm not the best of men on a bike." He began to laugh. Then she saw him catch himself up. He went on deliberately, his eyes on the tulip-bed.

"No. That 's not speaking truth together. I 'd like to go well, and for you to go. Only—"

Bridget's frankness veiled itself with something gentle as she waited for more.

"It 's her I 'm thinking on. She 'd be pleased and proud, I know that. But—"

"Yes?"

"I would n't have her take you for a young lady. You 're—not what *she 'd* mean, anyway."

"David," said Bridget, with deep se-

riousness, "shake hands. You have some glimmerings of intelligence."

"Thank you kindly, I'm sure," said David, a small smile stirring his lips. "I should be pretty well baked lop-sided, should n't I, if I had n't some by now, being as I am?"

"Maybe," she answered, "but I think you'd always have had them. It comes out in other ways." She glanced at the gown.

He shook his head gravely.

"Not if I'd been left at bird-starving."

"What is bird-starving?"

"What my younger brother'd be at now, if I had one. You sit under the hedge with a clapper when the crop's coming up, to drive them off. You may bide there best part of a morning and not see half a dozen, if Farmer's a careful man."

“Time to think!”

“You leaves off thinking, when that ’s your life. Look here, Bridget, I *shall* be late.”

“Well, come on Saturday and hunt Dad’s book-shelves.”

When he was gone, she stood still in a muse. How curious it was to hear his tongue, his very words, change when he thought of the fields! The voice of a gong and an aroma of roast mutton reaching her, she ran up the steps, unbuttoning her overall.

The use of a common playing-field caused a “girls’ half” to fall on a boys’ whole school-day, save on the Saturdays dear to both. Bridget’s afternoon was free. When Ned, who was leaving at mid-summer, to be articed to his father, followed David’s road, she stood looking at her neat new bicycle. Then she sat down on the top garden-step and thought for a con-

siderable time. Bridget had a clear and a stable mind. After a bit, she usually saw her woman's way. Alone from babyhood with two male things, she had had to learn how. She went indoors and put on a clean white blouse. Contemplating a springlike hat, she shook her head, tried the more natural "tammy"; then, thanking the heavens for a windless day, decided on the hat. "It's a formal call," she remarked to herself, "though most likely the compliment will be lost on her." When she had visited the garden again, she rode away through Spetterton High Street, and turned up the hill past the hospital, a stiffer climb than the London road. Among the green lanes, she stopped to pick white violets, dawdling under the sweet sunshine, promising herself to gather more coming home.

It was after half-past three when she came to the gray cottages. In the bright

garden before the little house that stood back, she saw a lavender-clump lately disturbed.

Save this, nothing but chance guided her: and dismounting she pushed the gate and went to knock at the door.

“Is Mrs. Bold at home?” she said at a venture.

Within, all was silence. Through the door, down the two little steps, she saw the small quiet house-place full of the sunshine, the dresser, the gate-legged table against the wall, the other, round and with the half cloth on it, ready for the tea cups, the clean broad stones underfoot. She had never realized David’s home, even when she had thought about it. Now with a sudden shock of understanding and change, she wondered, was her visit that thing worse than a crime, a blunder? an intrusion into her friend’s sacred things?—
“Rubbish,” concluded Bridget, with de-

cision, taking refuge in mere good manners. She knocked again to encourage herself.

A step sounded on a creaking stair, and Esther Bold came through the house-place. Her dressing for tea being as much a matter of course as a Duchess's for dinner, she had been upstairs changing her gown. Her clean apron covered up her brown skirt; her beautiful hair, unstreaked as yet, lay close to the shapely head so like her boy's, in firm plaits; her grave mother's eyes looked in love on every young thing. The girl's clear look took her in silently for a moment: intensely attracted, unfamiliarly shy. Those eyes stirred something unknown and demanding, that she was afraid of, deep at the roots of Bridget. She spoke quickly.

"You're Mrs. Bold? I came over to thank you ever so much for the lovely creeper and the love-in-the-mist, and all

you gave David for my garden. He and I put them all in this morning, and—”

“Do please to come in, miss,” said Esther Bold. Bridget fiercely regretted the tammy. It was her way to come to grips with a disagreeable thing.

“I can’t,” she said mournfully, “if you ’re going to call me that! I ’m just Bridget Burton, David’s school-fellow. He does n’t make hosts of friends; and I ’m proud that he ’s mine. The school ’s going to be proud of David, I can assure you, when he ’s a bit older.” Esther Bold’s cheek flushed.

She held the inner door quietly open. Bridget knew she had pleased.

“Will my bicycle be safe? Oh, thanks, I ’ll fetch it in.”

Returning, her bright eyes met Esther’s across a mass of soft white, pink-tinted.

“I thought you might like some of my

double tulips. These are just out, and David said you had none."

"Well, I 'm sure—they 're lovely. But do ee come in." Mrs. Bold turned round a fireside chair. Reaching an old blue jug from the dresser, she stepped "out back" to fill it. Then looking across the nosegay at the fresh face full of its character, the ruddy plaits, the young, lissom figure, she smiled. "I 'm sure I 'm that pleased to see you, like one of the flowers yourself, such a lovely day. You live to Spetterton then, m—my dear?"

"My brother 's with David at Nicholas'; and I 'm in the Sixth Form on the girl's side. That 's how we know each other. My father made the plans for the new vestry at your church. Mrs. Bold,—who *did* make that sampler?"

"That 's mine. They don't teach ee samplering there, I reckon. 'T is all forgot now. My mother 's there,—you

should look at that. And here 's my Emily coming, must show you hers; and we 'll have a cup o' tea."

"Is she at school?"

"She left Christmas-time; come the winter she 'll be going to place, I hope. Her Granny 's ailing just now and Emily 's mostly down there. My dear! here 's a visitor come to see us, Miss Burton as goes to school with Dave, and have brought us them lovely tulips."

Emily came to an abrupt stand-still; she carried a bundle tied in a blue handkerchief, as well as a milk-can; and she wore a lilac-checked long pinafore over her cotton frock. The wide-open friendliness of her blue eyes was crossed suddenly by something strange to them, as they realized the girl examining Granny Fielder's stitchery, who held out a greeting hand.

Emily took it and let it drop: turning,

shy and wordless, to hang up her sunbonnet.

“You got to fetch your sampler, too,” her mother said, to help her out. “I put it by in the drawer upstairs.”

Emily opened the brown door in the wall and there was silence while her loud step mounted, paused, and came down again. She held out the folded work dumbly to her mother.

“Show it to Miss Burton, while I set the tea.”

Approaching Bridget, Emily laid it on the table and, still wordless, stood by her, first on one foot, then on the other.

“I wish I could mark like that, it would be nice for one’s things. Wasn’t it a long job?”

“No,” said Emily stolidly.

“It’s all done by thread, of course.”

“Yes.” The same dull, raw voice.

Bridget’s eyes glanced up at her.

David's sister! This rough, sandy-headed girl.

"Thee better fill the kettle," said Esther Bold with a grave mildness.

As Emily disappeared: "You'll excuse her, my dear. She's one o' the shy ones. Misses our Dave something dreadful, she do, just after he's gone: makes her like that. Yes, put her on, Em'ly. Won't you come out while she's boiling, and look at my flowers?"

Tea was still in progress when a large cream-colored figure darkened the door.

"We've begun a bit early, Father, having a visitor." Mrs. Bold repeated her explanation, and Bridget, rising, held out her hand. Father, handsome as he was, went further to mystify her thoughts on David. His large palm left white dust on her fingers, which he dropped exactly as Emily, and he nodded mutely to his wife and went out by the back door: from a

further region came sounds of pumping and splashing, and Esther bade Emily fetch Father's shoes. When he returned, cleaner but less picturesque, Bridget essayed conversation on the weather, which met with agreement, though "you don't know much about it when you be underground." A certain check fell on the former feminine chat, and Father, occupied with deep draughts of tea, did nothing to fill the gap. Glancing at the clock, Bridget took her leave. Esther followed her to the gate with cordial good-byes "and come again, do ee, my dear." Looking after her, she smiled and sighed.

"Sweetheartin' a'ready!" said Esther Bold.

Bridget, riding home in the soft evening, tried to re-adjust her thoughts and see the David of Nicholas' in this new *milieu*. She found it well-nigh as hard as realizing a departed friend in heaven. Her heart

sank a little and her eyes grew grave. The more did he need all that Nicholas' and the new life could give him. She sat upright at the top of the long hill, and put on her brake firmly. Friendship is a serious responsibility. Then her thought called back Esther Bold: the country voice, the unconscious dignity, the serious eyes that were like home. A motherless girl, swallowing deep in her throat, sped past the white violet bank with unseeing eyes.

"Who was that come to tea?" Father said, between the puffs of his pipe.

"She's one that goes to the other part o' Dave's school; come over to thank me for some bits of plants I give him for her garden."

"Uncommon fine girl: taller 'n you, Em'ly."

"She's older," said Emily quickly. She rose to fetch a reel of cotton from

the table. As though after reflection, she added: "I reckon she 's pretty wasteful, wearing her best hat of anyday."

"I went to thank your mother," Bridget said, "the same day you were here."

David, halfway up the library steps, looked quickly from between two dusty covers. "Was she at home?"

"Yes, and gave me tea; and your sister and your father."

David sat down on the top step, his finger between the pages: he met her eyes with a sort of detached thoughtfulness.

"You 'd find it a queer little place after here," he said, with an odd simplicity, "just about an old house, ours is."

"Your mother 's lovely."

His eyes changed, till they were almost like Esther's own.

"Emily was shy, was n't she?"

“Yes. I don’t think she fancied me.”

“She *don’t know*,” said David with a touch of eager apology.

Bridget smiled.

“David—you must get your mother here for Margaret’s Day. All the parents come.”

His look brightened. “So I should. I never thought upon it.”

She taught him everything, he said to himself. To know her was a liberal education.

VIII

“THEE new bonnet’s awful pretty, Mother.”

“Don’t seem as I knows myself in it,” Esther Bold said. She turned to the little square of looking-glass to draw the new adornment forward on her head. “There, we’re as the Lord made us, Emily, when all’s said and done.”

“He made thee awful nice, then,” said her daughter valiantly, “and thee did ought to have what sets ee. Open out thee pocket-handkercher, for luck.”

“Tut!” said Esther, but her lips smiled. “You run on, now, child, else Granny’ll be waiting for her dinner. The cart won’t come this ten minutes.”

She followed Emily downstairs: and the

cart delayed. Presently she stood at the gate watching for it. The twentieth of July was a true gala day. The wide view, all rich blues and soft grays, was crossed by no cloud-shadows; the clove-carnations in the border scented the warm air.

Along the road where the cart should come, a man in white clothes appeared, running. As he neared, his pace slackened. He lifted a hand.

An odd shock startled Esther Bold. She unlatched the gate and went to meet him.

Every window of the hall was open. The long room was full. On the platform, one small lady's pale gray costume, and the dashes of red upon a Bedesman's gown relieved the flat blacks of the group of masters.

"English Essay, Bold," Frank Fletcher said; and resumed his seat.

The room rustled lightly: the ladies in bright summer gowns and men in frock-coats, slightly bored, settled themselves with commendable patience to be quiet through another prize exercise. At least this one was in the vernacular.

A boyish voice, pitched nervously a trifle high, with an unconscious cadence in it, began to speak. After half a dozen sentences, the silence had ceased to be a forced and guarded thing. The tall boy was not reading. He was telling a story; which began:

“Towards the latter end of the 15th Century, a learned and kindly gentleman—”

A girl in a dainty white frock and poppy-trimmed hat, on one of the raised benches at the Hall's end, cast a searching, slowly despairing glance over the company and settled herself to listen.

The silence lasted. At the close of the story, a burst of clapping rose.

On the platform, the lady in gray leaned over and spoke to the Master.

“Who helped him with that?”

Frank Fletcher turned.

“Books. No one else.”

“Are you sure?”

The Master smiled. “I know the boy.”

There was a movement in the Hall. The Master rose and requested Miss Nicholas to give away the prizes, displayed in rows before her on the table. When Bedesman 4 came up, amid applause, the little gray lady leaned across the table, almost as her stature had compelled her to do when the smallest boy came up.

“Thank you,” she said, handing over the bound volumes.

The boy was evidently confused. His hand went instinctively to where his cap should have been and dropped disappointed. He blushed furiously.

A few minutes later, the audience,

streaming out of the heated hall, clustered about white-clad tea-tables on the bowling-green, amid a buzz of talk.

“Bold! This way. Miss Nicholas wants you introduced.”

The Master led David towards a bench where Miss Fletcher and the gray lady were accepting cream and cakes from a strikingly handsome elderly gentleman. Bridget, eagerly watching their approach, sat next Miss Nicholas, who shook hands with David and looked at him straight.

“I hope you will come and see me at the Hall some Saturday. I will show you the other portrait of the Founder and some possessions of his. Will you get me some more tea?”

David did not know afterwards what he had said, in his effort not to fall back on the “Thank you kindly” of his childhood. When he returned with the tea-cup, the gray lady was in conversation, and thanked

him with a nod; and Bridget said: "She is n't here!"

"I know. I've looked for her everywhere. Something's happened to stop her. I say, could I be heard?"

"To the very end. It went grandly."

A new group approaching, they were parted. In the movement David felt a touch on his shoulder.

"I want to take a look at your buildings. Could n't we slip away from all this?"

David knew not why the wise and whimsical countenance of Miss Nicholas' elderly friend recalled an hour in Bloody Lane, that lay three summers behind him. Something was swelling in him, jubilant but very shy. He was glad to get away.

"You've not rightly seen hall, sir. Come this way, please."

Their progress became a continuous joy. The old gentleman, it appeared, was by nature argumentative, and held diametric-

ally opposite views on antiquarian matters to those in vogue at Nicholas. It was impossible to hear such sentiments and not unloose one's tongue. By the time the Bedesmen's rooms were reached, their attitude was one of unembarrassed sparring.

David offered his armchair. The guest sat down with evident satisfaction.

"You enjoyed writing that essay," he remarked. "Where did you hunt up all that knowledge of the time?"

"Part of it was Froude: part old books Mr. Burton lent me."

"One of the masters?"

"No, sir: he's an architect, but he has a sight of odd things on his shelves, school statutes, old church accounts and things in Spetterton, and Cathedral records. You get soaked with a period that way. Then you—" he stopped suddenly.

"Yes, you—?"

"I studded on it," the boy said slowly;

“that ’s like to seeing it, after a bit. I met a Professor once, told me that was the way.”

“Ah!” said the elderly gentleman. He seemed to meditate. “You ’ll be a writer in a few years,” he remarked. “When you have something done, come up and show it to me. Barabbas was not of my firm, though they say he was a publisher.”

On the card offered him, David read with amazement a name hitherto associated only with the backs of revered books. Without waiting an answer, the old gentleman put his head out of the window, asked some one below if a train was not due, and then ran downstairs without further parley. David stood still in the midst of the floor, then slowly went down too.

The throng was beginning to thin, and the boy, avoiding it, doubled down a back passage, made a quick circuit and presently swung himself over Miss Fletcher’s

garden railings. He wanted silence, alone-ness, "the sweet smell of the fields." In the open meadows, under a hedge fragrant with honeysuckle, he lay still, on his back, for a long while. His eyes followed the moving cloudlets. His soul within him spoke with strange new things. Before he was aware, the fathomless blue swam before his sight. The world grew bigger and bigger. The beginning! ah, the beginning! How good is the beginning!

The golden mists of Life's morning parted round David Bold. For this fair, intense moment, the thing he was to do, to be, was with him, was his own. As though already he were the man to come, it was there, quick, newborn, his life, himself. That joy within him swelled into one great sob, that, breaking, shook and startled him, and left wetness on his cheek.

Ah! the long days, the weeks, the years, for work—work!

The marvel that had brought a peasant-boy to this home, where his soul dwelt at ease! And all Oxford to come!

Great words, remembered from a Browning reading in Bridget's garden, leaped to his lips:

I go to prove my soul!

I see my way as birds their trackless way.

I shall arrive!—

After a long while, the voice of a bell warned him. He rose slowly. To keep rules was always less trouble to David than to break them: though the thought of tea was odiously material.

The bowling-green was empty now, save for a pair of waiters lifting the last trestles and picking small litter from trampled turf. All wore its familiar air. With reverence to all visions, thick bread and butter is good. David had finished his third slice, when a hand touched him.

"You 're wanted in the lodge," the porter's voice said.

“Me?” said David, turning. Something in the man’s face startled him: he got up at once, aware of a deep and formless fear.

In the little square room, his mother rose from a chair. She looked very white and tired, and wore a bonnet he did not know. When she had kissed him, she moistened her lips as if to let words pass through. But none came. Something unknown took hold on David’s heart. It said he was a man: she, for all else she was to him, a woman.

“Come along to my room,” the boy said. Going up the stairs, he watched her steps as though she might fall.

The wooden chair stood where the publisher had left it. David put her in it and sat on the edge of the table, waiting.

Esther Bold lifted her head. For a long moment she looked at him mutely.

“Dave—thee Father’s hurted,—terr’-ble bad,—up to quar’—this morn-ing”

She looked round, like one realizing. “I were just ready, coming off—here.”

“Is he alive?” the boy said hoarsely.

She nodded.

“They’ve took him to the ’firmary. But they don’t know—not yet. The right leg. That’s broke. And his arm. And maybe there’s more. A piece o’ roof come down. I’ve just come away. They was awful kind.”

The boy gave a queer little nod. His lips grew white, but he kept hold on himself.

“When’ll they know?”

“They can’t tell that. They’ve set the leg; ’t is a awful bad break. But he ain’t come to. Maybe—”

“He never will?” David said. She nodded.

“‘T were the Lord’s mercy he weren’t clean killed.”

Something in the well-known pious phrase was more than her son could bear. Tears smarted in his eyes. He gripped one arm with the other hand till he could have cried out with pain. He spoke quickly. It was the old speech.

“How are thee going home? I sha’ come with ee.”

“I ’m stoppin’ the night here, wi’ Eliza Simms as was; going back to the ’firmary to-morrow, nine o’clock. Emily ’s down to Granny’s.”

“Does she know?”

“Yes. I stopped there to tell ’em. They took him right off from quar’, so soon as they got him out, in Mr. Richards’ carriage; and John Drew he run down to tell me.”

“I shall go to the Infirmary with ee. Master ’ll let me off second hour. You

bide here quiet, and I'll see him. Have thee had any tea?"

"The nurse give me a cup, but I could n' drink none. I'd like very well for thee to be wi' me a bit."

"Thee can bide with me here," he said, and went away. His mother drew a long sigh. Looking round, she seemed to see the room as in a dream: her boy's little place, with its open window, that she pictured to herself at home. The climbing rose thrust in soft pale heads. A couple of books, a gentleman's card, were on the table: a bunch of wild flowers on the mantel. She wondered, dreamily, where Dave got the little blue jug. It was pretty—Why was she like this?—The shock, most likely. She had been herself all right, till now: just as if she had no feeling.

Below stairs, David followed his knock into the study. The Master, addressing a letter for the post, looked up.

“What ’s wrong, Bold?” he said quickly.

Upstairs, he drew up the other chair and sat quietly by Esther, as they spoke together.

“David, your mother would be the better for a glass of port wine. Go and ask Biggs to bring me some up here.”

The boy’s lips smiled, mechanically, as his mother answered: “I could n’t, sir, ’turn you many thanks, bein’ abstainer pledged.”

“Then a sandwich, a cup of tea. You had dinner early.”

David was despatched this time.

“He shall go with you to-night, for as long as you want him: and to-morrow to the Infirmary. You ’ll have him home, you know, next week. He ’s had a great success, to-day, Mrs. Bold. I wish you had been there. His essay struck people much.”

She looked back wordlessly: her lips

quivered. The Master took leave of her kindly. Back in the study he stood still. "Of all the maddening events—!" said Frank Fletcher aloud to the silence.

David, setting the tea on the table, picked up the visiting-card, thrusting it into his pocket. Sitting beside her, he helped his mother, seeing her eyes revive gradually and become themselves.

"What 'll thee do," he said, abruptly, "if he 's in there long?"

"He 'll be on club. I sh' have nine shilling a week for eight weeks, six after. I must go up to Rectory when I get back home. They was wanting some one for their washing."

David flushed. "Thee 've never took in no work," he said with a touch of offense.

"I 've never needed, thank the Lord. But I 'm good at it. My mother were laundress, thee knows. Nine shilling ain't

like twenty-four: and he 'll want a lot o' things when he comes out."

She sat silent for a space, and ceased to eat. "Maybe," she said, slowly, "he 'll never go back to quar'. 'T ain't work for a man as has been all broke up."

David watched her with wide eyes. Then he filled up her cup; she stirred. "We just got to wait on the Lord. Maybe he won't—"

She stopped suddenly.

"Thee got me," the boy said, in a hurry.

His mother looked at him wordlessly. Then she drew him nearer. They were locked in a long kiss.

When David turned back through the streets from the house of the kindly Eliza *née* Simms, the warm summer dusk was deepening towards night and the lamps shone yellow. Before the closed window of a large stationer's the boy stopped. A

white notice was fastened to the window with wafers. He read it through three times.

“David!” a surprised voice said.

He turned. Bridget’s face, under the poppy-trimmed hat, changed as she saw him. “Something’s the matter.”

He nodded. The sight of her seemed to rob him of speech. She was so dainty, so pretty, so utterly part of the gay scene that had been his triumph.

“Come home with me,” the girl said, grasping a situation she knew not. “I’ve been at the Hall all this while with my god-mother.” She glanced up and down the silent street as he turned mechanically by her side and spoke slowly.

“Mother came,” he said with a miserable smile; “my father was nearly killed in the quarry this morning. She’d been with him to the Infirmary. I’ve just left her.”

“Oh, David!” the girl breathed.

She went on swiftly beside him into Church Square round the corner, and opened the door with a latch-key. “Father ’s dining out,” she said.

In the long old schoolroom the windows stood open to the soft air-swept twilight. They sat down together; and he told her bare details in detached sentences.

“Most likely,” came the last, “he ’ll die.” The boy dropped his chin on his palms. He sat staring before him, composed, tearless. But his eyes had that in them that made her afraid.

“I ’ll have to leave school,” he said. Then suddenly he sat up and turned on her. “A pretty thing to be thinking of that,” he cried harshly, “when my father ’s a broken man, at the best. But I do.”

“Hush, David! You *must* think of that. It ’s your life. I should myself; and I ’m a girl.”

“Mother ’s going to take in washing,” he said, between his teeth. “I ’d have thought nothing of that three years ago. Now I can’t stand it. Bridget—what ’s been done to me?”

“You ’ve been educated, that ’s all,” said Bridget simply. She was not sure she had uttered the fundamental reason; but she realized a deep calm within her that could be leaned on like a quick-set hedge, and that had to mean help. Her mind went on working. She had fallen in love with Esther Bold, but found it quite possible to visualize her at the wash-tub. Not so David behind the plow.

“You ’re older, too. But David, you *sha’n’t* leave. There are ways—”

The boy’s eyes dwelt on her, large, and with a dreary wildness in them. He stretched out his hands with a dramatic gesture and took hold of her wrist.

“Feel! They ’re strong. If I ’d been

left there, they 'd have been at hard work this three years, beginning with five and then eight or nine shillings a week. I shan't make that now; but my mother need n't slave for me."

"You 're talking wild," said Bridget steadily. "No reasonable being would put you to field work now."

"What would you put me to? It will be five years with the biggest luck before my education brings in anything. I 've to be earning *now*: how does n't matter since it can't be by—"

He got up. Turning his back he thrust his hands fiercely down into his pockets, fighting for self-command. Suddenly he turned, and flung something into her lap.

"Look at that. *He* said to me: 'You 'll be a writer. When you 've something ready, bring it to me.' "

There was light enough by the fading window to read a name.

“David!” the girl said. There was a long, dead silence. Then Bridget sprang up from the window-seat. Taking him gently by the shoulders, she turned him towards her.

“David, look at me.”

As their eyes met, he knew, despite the dusk, that hers were shining like stars. In his there was no confiding, only a wide and dreary misery. The girl gave him a quick little shake.

“Don’t be tragic till you must! There are things to be done. Only they ’ll take a little time.”

He shook his head. Gently he slipped from between her hands.

“Don’t you see,” he said, very quietly, “it has got to be, or else I ’ve got to be a cur? Which would you choose?”

“Don’t go and do something precipitate—”

She stopped, unable to finish.

“What would the Founder say?” asked David almost fiercely.

William Bold was conscious, when wife and son sat beside his bed next morning. The stricken face, the slow speech, the great, prostrate, motionless figure were as nothing to Esther, when once his eyes knew hers again. To David's young consciousness, they were a shock and a horror that he could not contemplate. He sat, hands clasped between his knees, staring at the white, scrubbed boards under his feet. Strong, sound, sufficient one moment; the next, broken in pieces. Was life like that?

The nurse drew near and spoke. Esther rose to go. As she turned from the bed, the sick man's eyes dwelt on the tall, boyish figure in the long red-bordered garment. There was a sort of hardness in them.

“Thee ’ll have to give up the book-learning now,” the weak voice said.

The boy’s eyes met his, aware, steady.

“I know, Father,” said David Bold.

He put his mother into the cart that was picking her up, and turned to go back to school. At the street’s end he paused a moment. Then, turning to the left, he reached the shop by which he had met Bridget. It bore over the door the legend “Spetterton Chronicle Office”; and the white notice was in the window still. David went in.

“Can I see Mr. Biles?”

“What name?”

“Bold. It ’s about the notice in the window.”

The young man opened a door behind the counter and took him through.

A small alert-looking man at a desk, at work on a long sheaf of galley-proof, looked up.

“Want to see me, eh?” He surveyed David critically, and his thin lips stirred at the corners. “Scarcely old enough for our staff, I ’m afraid.”

“You said a man that could write, and had evenings free,” said David desperately. “I got the English Essay at Nicholas’ and—”

The editor smiled. “No reporting experience, I expect?” he observed, looking at his watch.

“I ’d do anything you set me to.”

“So would half a dozen men twice your age, and want no teaching. I ’m afraid it ’s no go.”

The boy went back through the shop and out into the street. Some time after twelve he sought Mr. Fletcher. Standing by the writing-table, he spoke carefully prepared words.

“My father ’s come to himself, sir: but they think very badly of him. I ’ve come

to say I 'm afraid I 'll have to leave. My mother 'll need me, if he does n't get well: and if he does, most likely we shall have to keep him."

The Master looked at him gravely. "The Council may have something to say about that, Bold. You came in on a Trustee's nomination."

"I know, sir—you don't suppose I 'm —" he gripped himself there, by ceasing to speak. "When I get home I shall know more about it," he said lamely, and turned to go. The Master glanced at him and saw much.

"Come down and see me when you do. I shall be here for the first ten days. Stop a minute, I 'll give you those books I promised you for the holidays."

He turned to the book-shelf.

The boy looked up quickly—an odd surprise in his face. The thing loomed so vast to him that books for the holidays

seemed a painful irrelevance. He took them and went.

It did not take very long to pack Granny Fielder's trunk; nor to bump it down the broad staircase to the gateway to await the cart which would take it home.

The old buildings were empty and quiet before ten o'clock that Thursday morning, with that dead hush of opening holiday that only school-folk know. From the hall's doorway the porter and the boot-boy, as David passed, were carrying out worn oak benches to be scrubbed and dried in the broad sunshine.

At the corner of the quadrangle he stood still, looking back, his eyes seeking the open window of his room. Deep in his soul lay that pessimism of youth, that sees not beyond a poignant moment. He would never come back.

Lifting a hand with an unconscious

gesture, he blessed the place in his heart.

Then he went slowly on into the fields, and took a turn away from his road homeward. He had yet one thing to do. It led him through pleasant woodland ways to a green and shady meadow.

St. Margaret's Chapel was open. In the midday silence his footfall on the flags and the little wicket falling to behind him echoed loud. In the space behind the altar Sir Humphrey and fair Dame Margaret lay solemn and peaceful in their sleep. The boy knelt down on the pavement, resting his forehead against the chill marble of the tomb. A strange and tender stillness came over him, body and spirit. He slowly ceased to think.

But within he spoke, wordlessly, as to some one quite near.

The conflict and distress within him, the pain of being torn away, began to die down, softening slowly to a deep hush.

Something unknown and solemn grew in him, a thing that the child he still was never yet had known. He no longer fought for his deep desire nor against it. He seemed to have laid it down on the step of the tomb, to be looking at it dispassionately, yet understanding it more deeply than ever he had.

The mists that blind pain raises lifted from his soul. In the clear light he knew for the first time that life's greater deed is always to give, not to receive. He knelt there a long time, understanding slowly.

IX

A LONG and rambling housefront in gray and lichen-grown stone lay warm in the sunshine under the brow of the hill. The place wore a still and almost an empty air, as Bridget set her bicycle against the low wall of the upper garden terrace and approached the front door.

“I know she was coming back yesterday,” the girl said to herself.

Till St. Margaret’s Day she and her godmother had not met since Bridget was a small, bright-eyed person of seven. They were friends, but a personal talk was the only means for Bridget’s present ends.

“Is Miss Nicholas in?” she asked eagerly of the leisurely and serious manservant.

“Miss Nicholas is gone abroad, miss. We had a letter this morning.”

“Thank you,” said Bridget slowly. She stood reflecting. “Can I have her address?”

“We have n’t one yet, miss. It ’s to be sent.”

Esther Bold’s son stopped before the gray farm-house two fields’ length from his home. As luck would have it, the farmer was crossing the garden to his dinner. David unlatched the gate and went in.

“Please, sir, would you be able to give me a job?”

The thick-set, gray-headed man looked with critical eyes at the applicant, who did not seem to fit his inquiry.

“Eh? Let ’s see. You ’re young Bold, are n’t you?”

“Yes, sir. My father ’s in the hospi-

tal; I 've come home to help my mother."

"Your father 's a quarryman."

"Yes, sir. But I 've no experience there. I 'm strong, and I 'm not stupid, and you won't find me a lazy one." He seemed to look at himself from outside, quite freshly and suddenly.

"Well,—I 'm cutting barley to-morrow. Be in the five-acre at half-past five and we 'll see what you can do there,—and pay you according."

David thanked him and went on.

It was past dinner-time. Emily stood at the gate. Cords would not have bound her to Granny's at this hour.

"Well, Sis," the boy said, lifting up his heart to the level of a smile. "I 'm late, I expect. I had to go out of my way."

"Dinner 's ready," she answered, her eyes dwelling on him. "Thee box ain't come yet, though."

His mother met him in the doorway.

She was pale still, but the mere look of her seemed to rest him.

"I went in yesterday," David said, "and nurse says they 're going to try and save the leg."

"Come to thee dinner," she answered, fondly, "'t is a long step."

The scent of the well-known stew, the sight of his father's chair brought something stinging into his eyes.

"I 've got a job of work, Mother," he said quickly, "down to Mr. Hancock's."

"That 's my good boy," said Esther simply.

At the meal, presently, she said: "I did ought to go up to quar' and see the master. He 's there to-day and we have n't said nothing about giving up the crane."

"I can do that," said David.

"So thee could. Thee must take Father's book." The quarry-master

might as well see the boy they had, Esther thought with a quick pride.

“Come along, Sis,” said David. As the two went soberly side by side, Emily’s eyes sought his face.

“Dave—do ee think Father ’ll get well?”

“I expect so. It ’s a week to-morrow.”

“Yes. Dave—” A pause. “Will he be—cripple?”

“I don’t know, Em. Nor they either. Bad injuries, the doctor said, and they were afraid for his back; but they don’t tell one anything.”

“Dave—what ’d Mother do then? And us?”

The boy looked across at the blue hills.

“Keep Father,” he said, steadily. “I ’ve left school. I shall speak to the quarry-master. Hancock isn’t worth much. Has Mother been after that washing?”

“Yes, she ’ll have it, when Sykeses goes.

Dave—are n't thee going back—not *never?*''

“Not if it 's so,” he answered, drearily. The words seemed to thrust at his heart. He glanced furtively at his Emily. Do gradual years divide confidantes from babyhood? He saw a light that she could not help grow over her broad face. She would not let it be a smile. Then swift compunction came.

“Oh, Dave—thee be sorry!”

“Never mind that,” he said. If a man had to stand alone, he did not need a girl to prop him up.

“Dave—”

“Yes?”

“Did n't I ought to go to place now?”

“Why, yes, we 've got to save her all we can. How do you come by a place?”

“You goes to Registry, or you asks folks. There 's Sally Bence is leaving from Rectory. Her mother were in to

Granny's this morning, a-telling up. She don't like the cooking."

"Sally was always a silly. Mother 'd like that for thee. We 'll go on up to Rectory after we 've been to quar'. Then you 'll be in before another one."

"Mother don't know! Oh, can us?"

"We 've got our own sense, child." He was immeasurably the elder now.

The quarry-master was in the little wooden office at the head of the white road running down into the ground. He looked at David seriously.

"This is a bad job, my lad, and a long one, I 'm afraid!"

David spoke fully. This was an old employer, who looked at you kindly, concerned for a valued hand. He paid over the full money and a trifle more. The boy was encouraged to ask: "Should I be any good to you, please, sir?"

"Let 's see, how old are you? Never

been underground? Where does your schooling come in?"

"Nowhere, I 'm afraid, sir," said the boy dejectedly.

"Come! Cyphering? Book-keeping? I 'm not wanting any one now, though. Think of you, if I should."

The two went on their way to the Rectory back door, boldly asking for Mrs. Richards. That lady, vigorous, but a trifle stumpy, in a short skirt and an apron, was busy with a spud on the lawn, where she interviewed them. David's fatherly air amused her; she smiled, rubbing the end of her nose with a mould-stained finger protruding from an ancient glove. Yes, Emily might do. She had better ask Mother to come and see Mrs. Richards. The round face beamed with broadening smiles, as they crossed the stile homewards.

"Nine pounds a year!"

“Well done, Sis!”

David swallowed a sigh. Who would rate him at nine pounds a year? When Emily became the better man, it seemed that humiliation could no farther go.

Mother's eyes swam and her lips twitched when she heard.

“It 's good to have good children.”

Emily came for a kiss, and trotted off to Granny's tea, but David went outside and took a long while bringing in wood. Sitting down to feed the fire, he remained staring at the leaping flames. His mother, coming near, rested a hand on him: the boy looked up quickly with a strained, sensitive face.

“Don't ee fret thee, child,” Esther Bold said, quietly.

“I bain't any good to thee,” he answered under his breath.

“Nay. Thee be comfort all the time. I looks to my son.”

His eyes searched her face.

“He don’t bring in anything.” Deep peasant instincts were making him ashamed.

“He ’ve give up a lot,” she answered, gravely.

He leaned his head against her. In his eyes tears smarted, but the feel of her brown gown, her stillness, her quiet touch brought him the fathomless comfort that is in unreasoned, primal things. That she understood was balm to him: but her motherhood was like some deep consciousness of God—not to be told, tender, mighty. After silent moments, he murmured:

“You gave up me.”

She smiled, above his dark head.

“And were glad to. Now, thee did n’t ought to have to go to field work, when there ’s been time to look around.”

He answered not, but, reaching out for her hand, laid his cheek against it.

Emily, on returning, was full of the future.

“Look ee, Mother, Granny ’ve give me a piece of calico, what she had by her, and her blue-print frock as is pretty near new, and Mrs. Bence she come in and she look just about sour.”

“She ’ll be main disappointed with Sally,” said Mother, gravely. “You mid get the scissors, my dear, and be unripping this, while I ’m gone up to Mrs. Richards. Your Granny ’s good to ee.”

Emily would have chattered on over her task. But David’s eyes were on a book, beside the hearth. The look of him oppressed her vaguely.

The three years for her had meant nine periods of holiday passed with an oracle and a wonder, a little more grown-up each time. Of his real development she had known nothing nor guessed she knew not, for at home he was still part of the old life;

the other, dear and precious as it was, dropped from him here like the Bedesman's gown he left behind: save for books brought back and read almost as he breathed, perpetually and unconsciously. With a part of him she was still one: and though bereaved between whiles, had scarcely known jealousy, save when the other girl crossed the path. Now, keeping silence, she slowly sobered in the midst of her own joy.

Turning a page, he heaved a long sigh. Emily dropped the scissors. Getting up she crossed, and took his head in her arms.

"Dave—I weren't right to ee. I *be* sorry, really—"

He sat more upright and smiled.

"All right, child," was all he said.

Esther Bold came in smiling.

"It 's all right, my dear. You 're to go Tuesday."

The boy rose and with a finger between

the leaves, went out. His mother looked after him.

“He ’s takin’ on bitter,” she said; “don’t take no notice, Em’ly. You and me can’t understand. The learnin’ ’s a lot to David.”

The morning was clear and dewy in the wide five-acre field. The long swathes of the barley fell rustling before the gleaming knives of the patent reaper, which George Marton, on the high gray-painted metal seat, drove steadily. David, following in the line of binders, learned his job gradually and silently from his next neighbor. The air was cool and sweet with early savors, under long tree shadows: the world, all pure and fresh, was bathed still in the deep gravities of night. The boy’s young, anxious soul drew in great breaths of refreshment and poetry. Cold tea and bread and bacon under the hedge found

him ravenous for breakfast. Exercise and early morning belonged to youth; and this was the world of his childhood. One could get on, if things were no worse than this. By "elevens," he was realizing that it was harder work than football. Over "fourses," after long fierce drinks of tea, he fell dead asleep along the ground, to be roused by shaking and loud raillery, that brought the blood stinging to his cheeks. But they were all old friends, and the other world was far away. He laughed with them. At home he fell asleep over supper and climbed the stairs to bed in a dream.

He looked to find all things easier as the days passed, and his spirits rose. All country instincts, for rich brown earth, and all green things and wholesome scents, were strong and pleasant in him. But, as the first week went on, he began to live in a deepening, ever-increasing, aching weariness. "He's over-old to begin," his

mother thought, anxiously. Barley-harvest lasted till the wheat was cut: the farmer kept him on and he had no other course: but Saturday's shillings seemed a poor price for the straining and spending and benumbing of one's whole being. The second week he ached less. His body was growing more accustomed, but—there was no mind. He seemed to travel on without one, never thinking, never touching a book; always, somewhere, weary, with that tiredness that weighs down the soul.

Then it happened to him, that as he sat in church on the second Sunday, long-known poetries of the Old Testament awoke him suddenly as from a deep sleep. He sat upright on the narrow seat beside his mother: his eyes brightened. Mr. Richards was a fine reader. The rugged, massive figure of Elijah the mountain prophet stood alive before David's eyes. Suddenly, once more, he was Bedesman

4, thinker, historian to come. He sat with parted lips, aware intensely of each majestic period.

All through life, David Bold never forgot that hour. It was as though he were alive from the dead. Things around him sprang into vivid relief. He saw the gray low quire-arch with its deep, strange chiselings, framing the quiet chancel beyond, so that it seemed some remote chapel of the mysteries. As if for the first time he knew that St. Ambrose, Broughton Priors, was a fine and an ancient church. His soul stirred to the sublime rhythm of the *Te Deum*. He knew his mother's face beside him, beautiful with the light that is devotion: his heart lifted; standing, he sang with all the rest, praising God wordlessly that these things were so.

And then he knew that the dumb sleep he had awaked from was the life he lived to-day; the life he had to live, unless those

rapt and lovely eyes were to look to a son in vain.

Late that afternoon, David came into the empty open church, and sat down in the same place. He had to square accounts with himself, and to be alone to do it. Resting his elbows on the narrow book-desk, his chin on his palms, he stared away from him up into the dim chancel. He was trying to call back an hour in St. Margaret's Chapel, whose grasp held him still. Was it *true*, the thing he had heard there?

To give—all that made the world worth having: to *be* the gift; never again to be himself; always the gift, the man denied his life.

Was this the Deed? this “the trackless way”? He saw it all, in a drear, yet patient vision: the cottage dwelling, the country speech, no mind for books, Oxford not even a dream; life shared with the simple, not the wise, the taught; outward things,

fields, cattle, growing crops—these the real facts that mattered; Emily the prosperous maid-servant, with a “young man”—David smiled drearily,—Father, the broken man growing aged in the chimney-corner, Mother—no, he could not stand that! He got up quickly. Stepping into the aisle, he walked with rapid steps up the church. Under the chancel-arch he stood, pressing his nails into his palms.

For her he could do this—anything. But if she were *gone*—! Some day your Mother *died*. If you needed her most of all, then she would go first. And then—the thing would have been done. There would be no going back: only the rest of life to live.

The boy stood quite still, setting his teeth. His vivid mind saw that which he saw. And, staring out between youth's blinkers, he saw it colored and itself, and saw it whole.

After a long pause, he drew a deep breath. No further light had dawned. He turned and went away out of the church.

It was all true, that dark vision. And there was nothing before him save to go on. Or—to “be a cur.”

As he walked, for one bitter instant his whole being waked up and raged, crying out against the futility, the silly waste of him. Then silently, relentlessly, he set his foot upon himself. David Bold was a man. He began to know it; for a man’s burden lay on him, that burden that is all the weak of the earth: the weak—and those who, since ever he had begun, had suffered and strained and labored and loved—that he might be.

* * * *

“Yes, child. I’ve come home. This time for good. I’ve hoped for it often: now I’m going to do it.”

"I 'm so glad, godmother!" Bridget leaned across the tea-table. "If you 'd waited a year or two longer, I should have been gone."

Miss Nicholas looked her over. "I suppose you would. Yes, I am glad. You 're like your mother, Bridget, though you 're a differently shaped woman. Now, if you 've finished, my dear, we 'll go into that library. I believe the servants are right. Tenants *are* one's natural enemies."

The long room looked west, with a north window also. The tall bookcases kept their treasures behind brass lattice-work. A little pile of folded dusters lay on the corner of a dark old table. Miss Nicholas picked one up.

"Bates thinks we shall want plenty of these," she said grimly, opening a bookcase door; "have you brought an apron, Bridget?"

It was the third of the August Saturdays. Hot afternoon sunshine lay over the broad land. . Cycling was warm work, but Bridget got over the road quickly, and sprang off eagerly at the cottage gate.

"Mrs. Bold," she said in the doorway, "are you at home? Can I see David?"

Esther came from the door, pushing aside a long flapping sheet drying on the new line set up down the garden.

"Oh, come in, Miss Burton." Stepping to the gate she looked up the road.

"They 're just comin'. I can see John Francis. They was to finish carrying the Sidelings about now. Yes, there he is a-comin' along." Turning back, she glanced over her guest. "You 'll have to give the poor boy a minute or two. He don't look very fit to talk to the likes of you."

Bridget's answer was to come to the gate.

The boy who came in sight wore a pair

of fustian trousers and a white linen jacket of his father's over his blue shirt, open at the neck. At sight of Bridget, his eyes woke up. The instant's vision of his changed face seemed to strike at the girl. She had never before seen David look half-asleep. His fingers buttoned the shirt at his throat. He had colored. She had come none too soon.

"I 'm not fit to shake hands," he said.

"I wanted to see you. I have a message for you."

He glanced at her quickly. His lips shook.

"Mother," he said, "I 'm about ready for some tea."

"Yes, my dear. Go in and clean yourself. Miss Burton 'll have a cup wi' us. There 's plenty o' wood."

Bridget went inside with a sense of having reached the middle of a situation before the beginning.

“My Em’ly she ’s got a good place,” Esther Bold said, as she reached the cups; “gone to the Rectory, between-maid, last Monday. ’Tis just a special blessin’. And Father ’s getting on a bit now. We saw him Saturday.”

“You and David?”—Had he come into Spetterton, and not to Church Square?—

“No, Emily. Dave ’s that tired when Saturday comes, he don’t want long walks. The field-work ’s pretty hard on him, for all he gets on with it.”

Bridget said nothing for a moment.

“I suppose it makes good money, though,” she said with an air of innocence.

“Ten and six a week he gets. That ’s harvest money, though. He ’s slow at it, never doin’ it till now. I hope, though, as Farmer ’ll keep him on. Here he is coming.”

The David who entered now seemed to his friend more like the real boy. He wore

a collar and the suit she knew, and he set a chair for her with the smile of a grave face. It was older. The mouth had grown firm; the eyes were steady, but less bright; the long, brown hands were roughened and their nails broken, but they had been well scrubbed. He cut the home-made cake, and lifted his mother's kettle, doing the host's small duties with a maturer air than Bridget had known in him, though he left the talk to the others, as though tea mattered most.

Esther rose. Heaping the things on a tray, she went "out back" to wash them, closing the door rather carefully after her.

David moved to his father's chair. He began to pull the half-burnt sticks out of the fire, laying them on the wide hob to cool against next time.

"What message is it, then?" he said, without preamble.

Bridget leaned forward, an arm on the table.

“The message is from Miss Nicholas. She ’s settling down, bless her, to live at the Manor, and I ’m staying with her for my holiday, while Dad and Ned are gone fishing. She is very anxious and busy over the library. She and I have been sorting and dusting and clearing for a week, but the more we do, the more there is, and the more she worships it. Her father and grandfather just let it be, but her great-grandfather was a bookworm, and his accumulations are marvelous. Yesterday she had a man down from London to advise. She could n’t abide him and said he looked greedy at the books: and she would n’t leave him alone a minute! But he let in lots of light and showed us how to sort, and to bring the catalogue to date, so that we can get on. But it will take months, and we want a helper with nothing

else to think about, who can work all day. The man offered us one of his expert youths at two guineas a week and board: and she thanked him very kindly, and sent him off with his fee. So now I 've come over to say she wants you."

The boy's mouth grew straight and he sat upright. "Me?"

"You. She 'll give you fifteen shillings a week and your meals, and she keeps a bicycle for the groom, that you can come and go on night and morning. She and I can show you the job; part of the day we 're working too."

"But I—I 'm not worth that money. What do I know?"

"Lots more than Tony Smart, who 'd come for sixteen, being the book-seller's son. At least the Master says so; and Dad."

"Did they recommend me? Was it all you?"

“She asked them of course, you loonie! Do you think she ’d trust a girl, about the books? She thinks every one either covets or would destroy them. But she likes you, because of your essay; and, since the Master trusts you, you ’re all right. Do you see?”

“Ye-s. I ’m better than Tony. But—I don’t know—”

“Don’t know what?”

The boy took up one of the cooling sticks and hit it hard against the hob: the last sparks flew up.

“Look here,” he said, speaking very low, “you know I ’d give my ears to come. But—I could n’t, and come back again to the field-work. It ’s a dog’s life, but very likely it ’s got to be mine, for—for *her* sake.” He nodded towards the door. “My education ’s of no money use. It ’s not gone far enough. And, if I ’ve got to choose—then I ’d better turn my back on it

now. Only a fool does a beastly thing at twice." He spoke with a repressed vehemence, that she had never seen. His lips shook. He hit the stick hard against the hob again, so that it snapped in two.

The girl looked at him, with eyes that dimmed, finding a poor male thing in pain a pathetic sight. She stretched a hand and laid it on his arm.

"See here, dear man," she said, simply, "we 'll ask your mother. Why, David—after this, you could get into a second-hand bookshop, and work right up!"

The tall north window looked obliquely over the green valley. The long, airy room, lay in calm, cool shadow and silence. Busy people do not talk.

The small elderly lady stood looking over David's shoulder. She was a person of an exquisite neatness and still very pretty. Her deep blue cashmere gown had

fine lace at throat and wrists: her small ringed hands touched the old table with firm finger-tips.

“Begin exactly below the last entry: under the P of Pepys. Yes, I like your hand, David Bold. But be careful not to straggle.”

Bridget, seated on the top step of the book-ladder, in a large print apron, looked down on the pair and smiled.

Thus, morning after morning, they worked together. In the afternoon David was here alone. He had grown quite used to the neat, absorbing employment; to the beloved scent of old books and the clear light from the high window; to the fine outlines of old furniture and fittings, and the quiet gaze of Sir Humphrey over the mantel in the gown of a Doctor of Laws, seated in his high-backed chair beside the table with the parchment and the ink-horn; used, too, though not so quickly, to lunch-

eon in the paneled dining-room with the two ladies, the serious Bates handing grave, well-seasoned dishes: and to a dainty breakfast tray when he reached the library at seven-thirty each morning. The boy half adored, half dreaded the simple, dignified detail of this ordered life. It was almost too much for him. He was refining every day; the broken nails growing, the brown fingers firm and capable upon the long quill pen, the young head handsomer. At moments he almost knew it: which thrilled him with a shock of fear. For he was William Bold's son still.

"Do you think of taking Orders, David Bold?" said Miss Nicholas, one morning, looking up from the neat fixing of a number ticket. Bridget had returned home yesterday.

David was a trifle startled.

"I—had n't, Madam," he said lamely.

(In the matter of address you could scarcely go wrong with Bates.)

“What *do* you wish for?”

“I should like to be a student,” said David, instantly; adding at once, “but I ’m not able to afford it.”

“It does n’t pay,” said Miss Nicholas, thoughtfully, “neither does the Church, for that matter. In that case, what have you thought of? You ’re going back to school, I hope?”

“I ’m afraid not, Madam. I thought of trying my chance at a book-shop. My mother needs what I can make.”

“I don’t like that,” said Miss Nicholas, with a touch of severity. “You ’re a Bedesman. You should go to Oxford. It ’s your Founder’s money, remember.”

A quick glance went as in appeal to the portrait. David flushed to the roots of his hair.

“He ’d rather you acted straight than

went to Oxford," he said quickly, without any "Madam."

The Founder's heiress looked quietly at him. After a moment's silence, she damped, and pressed a handkerchief upon, another neat ticket.

"You are right, David Bold," she replied gravely, and silence fell.

After half an hour's work, he rose to put a batch of books in their shelf for her.

"Some of those," she remarked quietly, "bear directly on his period. Some day I want a Memoir written of him. I have quantities of papers. Will you do it for me, David Bold?"

The tall boy turned round. His hands still full of the books, he gripped them tight lest, in his excitement, one should fall. He stood silent, deprived of speech. But her eyes dwelt on him. "Well?" she said. Then David stirred.

"Madam," he answered, steadily and

clearly, "I will do it, if I never do anything else in this world."

Through the golden October days, David Bold still worked in the Manor library, and the benches of Nicholas' School knew him no more.

A month ago a stooping man on crutches had come home from the Infirmary. At the end of the long fight, he had lost the leg. There was no question of sparing David's fifteen shillings. As November came in, the crutches were discarded for two sticks, then for one; the doctor at the hospital discharged the patient.

"I 'm goin' up quar' to-morrow," the big man said to Esther Bold; "maybe there might be a little job as I could do."

There was a dumb, great yearning in his tired eyes. Each day he had walked a little further, till now the wooden leg

went far; but who would employ it? The days went slowly. Esther's face grew thinner. Her heart was full of fears for her husband, the strong man stricken in his strength.

The short day was fading when he came stumping back again. Esther at the table was ironing a shirt by candle-light, while David came and went, fetching and breaking up sticks for the fire. He came home at dusk, Madam permitting no lights in the library.

"Missus," said William Bold's voice in the doorway, "I got a bit o' news for ee."

"What is it then, Father?" she answered, quietly: but David, going "out back," stood still.

"I found the master up there. Wilcox is taking on Barley Down Quar'; and Fletcher's put up for our new foreman: and under-foreman's place is to fill.

‘Could you do it, Bold?’ the Master says, — ‘’t is mainly up ground, see, loading up carts an’ the weighings.’ ‘I ’d be main glad to try, sir,’ I says, ‘but a wooden leg ain’t a man, as ever I heered of.’ ‘Might do, if he ’s a straight ’un, like you,’ he says, ‘as it pays a man to take on.’ ”

“Praise the Lord, my dear!” cried Esther Bold, her iron suspended in the air. Setting it down, she saw her boy in the shadow and turned quickly. .

“Thee can go back to school, now, child,” she said instantly.

There was a moment’s silence. Then, with dry lips, David answered,

“Better wait a week or two, and see how Father gets on.”

David stood by the library table, wiping his quill pen with a little wad of blotting-paper. Miss Nicholas, inspecting the last

written pages of the catalogue, nodded.

“Your hand has improved, David Bold. Well, I am very glad you are returning to school.”

“I shall be up on Saturday, Madam, by two o’clock. It’s light under that window well till half-past four. When Christmas holidays come, I can be here every day.”

“Your studies must not suffer. Otherwise I shall be glad to see you.”

David smiled quietly. He had a word more to say.

“The task you set me, Madam,—” he glanced towards the mantel. “I am beginning to see my way. I’m afraid it’s a long way, if the thing is to be rightly done.”

Miss Nicholas raised her eyes. “Surely, David Bold, you have not imagined a school-boy could do it?”

“Of course not, Madam. But he can be

—contemplating it, and preparing. So long as you know that he is.”

“I have every confidence in you, David Bold,” said the small old lady calmly.

“Thank you, Madam,” he answered with his mother’s own seriousness.

“Good-by, then, for the present. I wish you very well.”

Together they left the long room. David took his cap from a peg and went out by a side door into the garden. Miss Nicholas turned the key in the library door.

The boy ran down the terraces with a light step, emerging close to the London road. Once more, pausing on the hilltop, he looked down on the home of his spirit. Once more its windows twinkled to the rosy farewell of the sun, the long roofs, the bell-turret, bathed in the mellow quiet of an autumn evening. Once more, a son of learning went down the hill, with a swell-

ing heart; he knew himself much more than three years older.

The Master, who happened to be talking to the porter, greeted him warmly; and he took up Granny Fielder's trunk and dragged it upstairs.

The little square room was very quiet, the inkstand on the table, the armchair in its place, as though no one had touched them since this day four months, when St. Margaret's sun shone in. On the door a Bedesman's gown hung, his cap above it.

"You 're a sight for sair e'en," Bridget said, the next afternoon, as she turned homewards from Miss Fletcher's door and met David coming through the meadow. "Good luck and many of them! You look as if you liked yourself."

"I feel a bit younger," he answered with a laugh.

"I daresay. You 've had a bad time. But it 's over."

David seemed to reflect.

"I would n't have gone without it," he said; "it 's beastly good for one to hate things for a bit."

After this somewhat cryptic utterance he began to pull a stick out of the hedge.

"I 'm two men, after all," he remarked, searching for his knife: "I suppose I always shall be.—I say, Bridget, I want to come and have a talk about that library. I 've a thing ahead of me."

Book IV

Gwen

X

PROFESSOR BROWNLOW'S room in College was on the first floor. It looked out on the Chapel quad, towards the north. A projecting gargoyle—a devil with prominent teeth and an engaging aspect—looked obliquely in at the oriel window, which was approached by two steps from the long, high room. Large book-desks, bearing each its open folio, stood in two corners; the long writing-table was piled with leather-bound books and neat stacks of written and printed matter; on the wall behind it hung a beautiful and elaborate pipe-rack, in carved cherrywood. The high and spacious chamber's furniture was mainly old and curious: much of it beautiful, some of it rather ramshackle.

The Professor sat at the table in a well-worn revolving-chair. His gown, faded by long use to a fine green, lay over the chair-back. His M. A. hood, in yet worse repair, hung upon a door-peg. The tidiest of men will fail to regard academics as really part of his clothing. There was about Professor Brownlow's appearance, mind, and habits a kind of crazy neatness, on which, however, as neatness, no dependence could be placed. His Professorship represented a remote corner of the field of historical research.

In a row of old Chippendale chairs against the opposite wall sat nine young men. The Professor was discoursing, an elbow on the table, his fingers buried in his thick gray hair.

"Yes—you 'll find your work cut out,—"
he was saying, with some feeling.

The man on the chair nearest the door, though he was attending, let his eyes

wander over the room and out of the window. The gargoyle's expression, foreshortened, brought a smile to his lips. Then his look came back to the Professor and he became absorbed in the matter of his future studies.

When the talk was finished, the men went away one by one, each after a moment or two given to his personal concerns. A red-headed youth, the last but one, spoke rather volubly for some minutes, in an accent unknown to the other. When, the door having closed upon him, the last man and the Professor were left alone, their conversation was short and technical, till the Professor, pressing certain advice, happened to glance up. His look changed: he seemed for a moment puzzled, and about to lose his thread. Glancing at a filled-in form, which the pupil had handed over, he seemed to see light.

"Why," he said, reflectively contem-

plating him, "the last time I saw you—"

"I wore a white smock-frock," said the young man, and smiled.

The Professor experienced a slight shock, distinctly pleasurable.

"To be sure. Cut-throat Lane, was n't it?"

"Bloody Lane."

"Ah, yes, and Pike's Piece. I'm always glad to see a Nicholas Scholar. Went in on my nomination, did n't you? How 's Fletcher? I believe I had a note from him—"

"He 's well and vigorous, like the school. He desired his kind regards to you, sir, and hoped you might be going down."

"One of these days, perhaps. Why, yes, he said you 'd been helping to straighten that library. He took me to see it once; when there were tenants in the house. There are good things hidden away there. Long may they stay!"

“Miss Nicholas will see to that,” the pupil said.

When he was gone, the Professor hung up his gown. He was smiling. “I wonder if he ’ll stay like that. Hope so. I shall keep that tale dark: not that it would hurt him. Might do him too much good,—with some people.”

In the street, before the College gateway, his pupil paused to consult a slip of paper from his waistcoat pocket: glancing up, he saw his red-headed neighbor on the opposite pavement, and crossed.

“Could you tell me my way?”

“That ’ll depend,” said the Scot, with portentous gravity, “on where you ’ll be wanting to go.—Eh? is that it? I ’m going myself in that direction.”

The lane they presently reached seemed to be all turnings. It went under a long wall over which looked yellowing trees, then past an ancient church, with a square,

oddly-narrowing tower, in its graveyard.

“They sent me a wrong address. When I went the people were full,” said David; “they wanted a pot of money too.”

“If ye ’re seeking something reasonable,” said the Scot, “there ’s a set at the top where I am, not a smart set, but ye have the air, and quiet. I came up three days back. For the people,” he added thoughtfully, “I would not say I ’d anything against them this far.”

“Many thanks. Along this way?”

“Number 14. The yellow house. I ’ve business in here,” said the other and nodded as he left him.

The yellow house was tall and had stone mullions and casements. In the passage, where the bell jangled, a girl of fifteen put a tousled head out of a door, behind which something savory frizzled loudly.

“They ’re upstairs,” she observed vaguely and withdrew. After waiting a

few moments, David thought he had better go after them.

Halfway up, an open door showed a Gladstone bag inscribed "D. Cameron." He went on, arriving at a tiny landing, which seemed all window and a prospect of waving trees.

Through another open door he saw a low room with a sloping attic-like ceiling and two windows. An old worn carpet covered somewhat uneven boards: beyond a table with drawers and a red table-cloth were an old cushioned wooden armchair, and a glazed cupboard showing teacups. But he did not look at these things. Before the fireplace, with her back to him, stood a small elderly woman in an old black dress; she had raised herself on what would have been tiptoe but for the four-inch sole and heel of one boot: and her fingers were traveling slowly, intimately, over the cheap ornaments, the dyed

grasses, the Bee clock which adorned the mantelshelf.

“The china shepherdess,” she was muttering, “her crook ’s got chipped. These fluffy things fair smell of dust—”

David, waiting for her to turn round, became aware that she would not. He spoke.

“They sent me upstairs to find you.”

The small woman started round, the lame foot slipping on the loose hearthrug. She would have fallen, and caught wildly at the first thing that touched her, David’s outstretched arm, to which she clung as for dear life.

“Here ’s the chair,” he said, and lowered her into it, where she sat panting, a hand on her side, shaken and silent, David standing by.

“Thank you very much, I ’m sure,” she said at length, slowly, “and pray, who is it? I can’t see you a bit. It ’s cataract,

both eyes. I do tumble about so bad—”

“My name ’s Bold. Mr. Cameron advised me to come and see your rooms. This is the set, I suppose.”

Her face began to beam irrepressibly. “Yes, the bedroom ’s through that door, if you would n’t mind looking. What College, please?”

David, after investigating the tiny but spotless place indicated, came back to enquire prices.

“I ’ll let you have them at that,” she said thoughtfully. “I think you ’re a kind man, saving me a fall like that. Men *are* so different. And, being as I am, I ’d rather have one that was considerate than a little more money. Oh, yes, I ’ve a helper—or shall have, now I ’ve let both sets. It was little Annie you saw downstairs, my niece. Then will you come in to-night, sir?”

“Yes, please, I ’ll bring my box round.”

He was looking over the pathetic little figure, with an understanding of her disabilities born of village days. "Now, if you're going down, hadn't you better have my arm? You're very clever to have got up."

"Oh, I can climb," she answered, with a touch of scorn; "going down is different. I sit on the top step and let myself down one by one. I must come up, you see, when term begins, to see it's all clean. I can't abide dirt and dust! You can sweep, if you *are* poor."

He piloted her safely to a tiny back room on the ground floor, where she appeared to live, learning on the way yet further details. At the stairfoot they parted friends. When, that evening, his effects unpacked, he sat beside a bright little lamp reviewing the work before him, he felt strangely at home. Through the further open window, came in a great daddy long-legs, bent

on self-destruction. David, expelling him, received in full face a deep breath of autumnal savors from the great College garden opposite, where ampelopsis began to redden over an ancient brick wall.

Then, solemn and treble, near and distant, the voices of Oxford bells rang and spoke the hour: and he knew that all day long, around all the new ideas, amid all preoccupation, their music had been there, clear or deep. He went back to his chair and thought he had begun to read again, when one deep tone spoke, thrilling through the little room, as though close at hand, grave, reverberant, alone.

As the solemn century of strokes passed, David sat spellbound. When they ceased, he knew deep within him that he was gathered in. The age-long glamor of Oxford held him once and forever, heralded by the great voice of Tom.

Mrs. Randall continued to approve of

her lodger, who astonished her next mid-day by rapping at her door with the information that he was going upstairs and could take his coal-box with him. When she asked, "Had n't Annie?" he opined seriously that it was n't work for a girl: he would carry the thing each day, if she 'd tell him where to find it.

The hours and the days filled themselves as by magic, in a life become wholly new. In the third week, a chance word suddenly waked David to the thought of Bridget. It was some months since he had seen her. She had come up a year ago with a scholarship. His last two absorbing terms at school had been empty of her company. At first he had missed her badly: and his mind turned to her now with keen satisfaction. He wondered how to proceed, then decided to go and call on her, as soon as he had time.

The University year opened with a few

golden weeks of "mists and mellow fruitfulness," full of Oxford's purest hours of beauty. On a calm Sunday afternoon David, his country soul avoiding the too populous Parks, turned between two black posts heading a narrow roadway. It was on the first of "Mesopotamia's" friendly benches that a couple of girls attracted his eye. One, rising, was saying good-by to the other. He recognized the figure she had left, and quickened his pace.

"Bridget!" he said. "This is a piece of luck!"

He sat down eagerly beside her. The girl, trim and dainty in a pearl-gray Sunday frock and hat, met him as he came. He saw that her eyes were older, her outlines more pronounced and womanly, that she was a person definitely in her own possession: but behind and beyond stood Bridget, his friend. He waked up into keen interest.

“I am glad I met you. I was coming to call. I ’ve seen your abode, from a distance.”

Her eyes filled with laughter.

“Were you?” she said. “Where are you? in College, I suppose?”

“In digs, till Easter, I expect. I ’ll give you the address. I say,”—as a cheerful family party, the junior members in a go-cart, passed, rubbing his knees—“is there any place where we could be quiet? I ’ve lots to say,—and hear.”

Bridget’s eyes considered: again that demure and mocking smile. “There ’s Marston Ferry just round the corner. We can get into the fields that way—if you like to.”

“To be sure I do.”

A pair of small children took much joy in sending the ferry-boat back for them, on its rattling wheel; and a few minutes took them into meadows not all unlike those

at home. David went on, talking eagerly: but slowly there gathered round him something strange, a little chill, that puzzled him. It seemed to be making him not himself. Yet Bridget seemed younger here in the fields. He knew her again with the delicious stimulus that comes of picking up old stitches. And yet that odd feeling kept him from being at ease. It seemed somehow to associate itself with Bridget's little smile.

At length she turned.

"I must get back. I *had* six calls to make! And I'm engaged for tea."

"When can we meet again? I want to show you—"

That smile came again.

"I should love to see it. I must. But—my dear man, you have yet to understand. We are hedged round with regulations. You see, you're an undergraduate."

"Well?" David was ashamed of the

sudden discomfort that came over him.

"I 'm not supposed to meet you, you see, without—I can ask you to tea, but I must ask some one else too."

"Why on earth—?"

"To make propriety. It's absurd, every one knows it is—never mind, I can get Miss Willis: you'll like her. When can you come?"

"But, I say—shan't we have any talk?"

Bridget looked at him ruefully, her head on one side. "I don't know. We'll try for it. I'll think and let you know. I *must* go now, David."

David, far from recovered, shook hands.

"Good-by. I shall be reduced to writing to you."

She went back across the fields. He was aware in himself with an intense annoyance that she would prefer his not following her. He sat down under the hedge,

embracing his knees and staring angrily in front of him. Why should he be deprived of his Bridget, any more than if she were a man? What did the—the old cats think he would do to her? Bridget; neither sister nor sweetheart, simply confidante and sound, peace-bringing friend.

A young pair, strolling past, with hands and arms intertwined, answered him. A sudden, consuming anger, such as only stupidity can wake, smote him.

Then a veil seemed to lift. This dear new world with its regulations, its unspoken laws, moving kind and stately on its time-old and unconscious way—he was scarcely at the beginning of understanding it. With the thought came a sharp moment of new knowledge. There was another, a coming world of youth and maiden, of which so far he knew, and meant to know, still less. Apart altogether from its rules, silly or wise, its concerns were

for no poor scholar as yet, thank heaven. No! he and Bridget had nothing to do with that!

Then rather suddenly he remembered that he had been asked to tea "some Sunday" by his tutor's wife; finding her address in his pocket-book, he recrossed the ferry, and found his way towards Northam Road, where for a somewhat crowded, but quite pleasant hour, he handed cups to bright-eyed girls and pleasant ladies, and mixed, chatting, with a friendly group of his own kind. He had lost his boyish shyness, and more and more found society an attractive thing.

* * * *

The window-seat was cushioned in a deep blue; and unlined curtains of the same serge filled and stirred in the mild October air. The room, not large, seemed full of fresh air and space,—the result of the considerate furnishing and fine taste of

one person, not stinted for money: a quiet place, workmanlike, dainty, and full of a definite character, hung with a few water-colors full of suggestion, and all by one hand. One, a tall, narrow picture of an Italian landscape, over the mantel, seemed to gather up and hold the room's meaning.

A girl sat, with her feet up, on the window-seat, balancing a cup of tea on the fingers of one hand.

"My dear Gwen," she observed, as another maiden brought her food, "where *do* you go for chocolate biscuits? Take it away! I'm greedy."

"So am I," said a slim creature, in an exquisite lilac frock, reaching a hand from a deep chair. "Did you say Bridget was coming? There'll be none left for her. Phyllis, you're real nice doing all the handing."

"You're tired, Lucy,—leave the cake-stand alone."

“I guess it ’s a sleepy afternoon,” said Lucy, sinking back, “and this is a sleepy chair.”

The girl on the window-seat, looking out across a green and ordered lawn at slowly-changing poplars and a softly gorgeous beech, here announced, “There ’s Bridget coming—where I can just squint round the corner. Please may I have some more tea?”

A tall young woman in white serge turned from the low table to receive the cup. There are faces that, turning round, seem to alter all the values of a scene. This was low-browed, soft masses of chestnut-brown hair sweeping up and back on the broad temples. The eyes, gray, wide, candid, under white, arched lids, were the eyes of an Englishwoman built on broad, calm lines. The finely-molded lips met gravely. The beautiful head, which had the little droop forward given to certain

Burne-Jones angels, seemed always to be seeking something to be kind to.

“That little old woman at the corner by Sargent’s made the biscuits,—and the cakes,” she answered, a little late, “Mrs. Franks. Her daughter’s my aunt’s maid. She’ll be glad of orders.”

“That’s Bridget on the stairs,” said Phyllis, “hear the co-educational whistle!”

A chorus of laughter greeted the newcomer, who dropped into a chair near the tea-maker, and drew off her long gloves.

“No sugar, dear angel. Co-education, indeed! Sorry I’m late, but I fell in with the nicest school-friend I ever had, and had to tell him he must not come and see me! Lord, what fools these—rules do be! Thanks, my hat will go here. Just a tinge more milk, beloved. How cool and sweet your room is!”

“What’s his name?” from the girl in the window.

“David—Bold, I mean. He ’s just come up to Cuthbert’s. Professor Brownlow thinks the world of him. Phyllis, how did you like ’Varsity sermon? I almost laughed once.”

It appeared that all but every one had at least criticized. For a minute, they all spoke together. When this ceased, they seemed to have descended into the depths of things. The talk grew eagerly, excitingly serious. Cups gradually emptied or were forgotten. Phyllis, the cake-stand put aside, defended the doctrine of Free-Will fervently, from the arm of Gwen’s low chair: on the ground that “only a cow-like person wants to be run.” Bridget held she would only be thankful; the trouble was that you were usually driven.

“Speak, dearie,” she said in a pause, two fingers on Gwen’s knee. The wide smile that answered her was all but motherly.

“Things are mostly—all right,” said Gwen, in her deep, low voice. “Of course, you must have patience. It’s a sad pity to lose all the lovely detail by the way.”

“I wonder,” said Bridget, still sitting there, when talk had died and the rest had all slipped away, “why you are such a rest, Gwen? You’re scarcely older than me, as real oldness goes. It must be that you’re bigger.”

“You should n’t go living as fast as Lucy does. It is n’t English; and we can’t stand it. Besides, you have n’t yet taken time to possess your soul in peace—no, I’m right, never since you came up. And just now you’re worried, child mine.”

“Perhaps I am. It was rather hateful meeting David like that. He did n’t understand.”

“Was it only a minute’s talk?”

“Dear, no! I walked him into the fields over Marston Ferry, just as though we ’d been an Oxford maidservant and her “fellow”! Think how pleased some people would be! And at home he has had the run of the house. We ’ve been friends since he first went to school—with Ned. I ’ve seen him through all his troubles and been his critic these six years: he has brought up things he has been writing to show me. And we can’t meet! Gwen—what would you do?”

Gwen looked out of the window: then cast a quick glance at her friend and smiled.

“I suppose I should n’t do anything; *Solvitur ambulando*. But I believe more in sitting still. Of course it ’s unlucky for us, and rather silly, that first rules can’t be altered, till the new world has come in and re-made all rules to fit itself. But that happens in every generation. Of

course, there's no earthly harm in Mars-ton Ferry, your father knowing all about you. But—"

"I know. One must be straight for the sake of the place, even if every authority privately thought as we do. It's tiresome, though. David has all but finished a memoir of our Founder. He has been working at it three years in the family library in holiday time."

"A *freshman*?"

"Yes. He's a quite big person, they say. The School's done everything for him. If he had a statue of the Founder, he'd burn incense to it. His people are poor."

Bridget's mouth closed suddenly. She was thinking of the look of the strong dark-eyed man she had seen. Who would notice any difference from other freshmen? Till she knew David had spoken of home, his friend would say no word. Men

come and go from the University in silence on their most vital matters.

“That ’s rather beautiful,” said Gwen quietly. “I should like to know him.”

“You would mix, for all your differences. What ’s that striking? Gwen, shall we read something? Shall I fetch *Peer Gynt*?” She went, while Gwen moved in the room, shaking cushions and straightening a table-cloth.

“Yes,” she reflected, “he wants her, very likely, now, but she ’ll soon leave off wanting him. The child ’s growing, bless her, and it will take all sorts to make Bridget’s world. Besides—she has a home.” Gwen stood still, looking from the window. “I wish”—two large tears stood suddenly on her cheeks. “Yes, I wish Dad had waited a little longer down here. What am I thinking about? How he might have suffered! And the dear old aunt and uncle—”

She sighed and shut the window. Left alone, she had come here of her own choice to read history, and "to learn what the real world was like, for a girl with her own money," as the others put it. Home or none, Gwen dwelt in her friends' hearts, tho' her own was too big not to be a little lonesome. The restful, white-painted room heard many confidences, and more "good talks."

"Come in, Bridget, child," she said, turning. "We 've nearly an hour."

XI

THE long and stately Hall of Cuthbert's, between nine and ten one spring night, was alive with a loud noise of talking: brilliant with electric light, and with the bold, yet dainty colors in vogue that year. The crowd was increasing; the demand for coffee-cups lessening. The great foreigner, in whose honor the College opened her gates, had done his speaking; and, conspicuous in his broad ribbon, moved round the great room with a small, bright-eyed, be-diamonded woman on his arm.

David Bold was relieved from active politenesses. His tall head glancing over the throng, he saw, not far from him, in a corner veiled from the room's blaze by a

heavy, drooping curtain, a little living picture. A girl in a curiously graceful dress of dull white satin heavily furnished with gold embroidery sat in conversation with Professor Brownlow, hirsute and shaggy as of old. The girl's long-gloved hands lay in her lap; she sat very still, as people sit with whom stillness is less a habit, or a conscious courtesy, than part of a character. Her head was raised: David saw it in profile. As he looked, the rest of the thronged room became a kind of dream. His eyes were on a face, in outline, pose, detail, very beautiful; but it was less beauty that held him than the grace of a certain turn of expression, half spiritual, half graciously protecting, that went to his heart. This lovely stranger seemed to him a thing known, almost belonging to him. For that look, combined with that calm stillness of pose, belonged to another woman—

An amused voice spoke near him:

“How do you do, David. You ’re looking at my friend, Gwen. Isn’t she lovely?”

“Do you see any likeness to my mother?” said David, as one in a dream. The Professor beckoned to him, and he moved.

Bridget watched him, her lips twitching. “Why, David, good lad,” was her inward comment, “don’t they say that’s the biggest compliment a man can pay a woman?”

The Professor was rising.

“Bold, Miss Brydon wishes you introduced to her. She is Founder’s kin, and you must show her the portrait. A copy, Miss Brydon, no more. The original is better known to you than to me, eh, Bold?”

“That ’s true,” said David, as one in a dream; then as the Professor shook hands, taking his leave, he turned, and found her

wide and lovely eyes, warm with interest, upon him.

“The picture is on the south wall,” he said; “you will see it best if you will come this way.” Beyond a long refreshment-table, he set a chair for her. “There he is. The original Holbein hangs in my old school, but this is quite good.”

“It is reproduced in your book, of course.” David’s color flamed and she smiled. “A friend at my College lent it me, Bridget Burton—you were speaking to her just now.”

He smiled now too, embarrassment passing away.

“Bridget knew me first when I wore a facsimile of that all day, as one of his ‘Bedesmen.’ She had much to do with that book, for she’s a stern critic. You will know Miss Nicholas too, his present representative. It was she who set me to write it.”

"Alas, no! I suppose I must confess the truth. There has been a sort of family feud, from my great grandfather's time, who took the name of Brydon for some property. The Nicholases didn't forgive him nor his son. But I hope by now she would shake hands if we met. Or her successor. Bridget tells me the succession is doubtful."

He sighed. "It depends on her will. The entail was broken some time back, and now there is no male heir. She seems equally friends with all her known cousins."

"Or with none," said Gwen, smiling. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Bold—there is a chair—and may I ask you something?"

He drew the chair up, waiting. Still the sense of unknown things, of a dream, was upon him. This simple talk was unlike any other in his life. Her deep, gentle tone thrilled him like the sound of Tom.

He could have listened to her for ever, even had she spoken an unknown language.

“I want to know how, given all possible musty documents, you managed to make that simple little book a work of art, a series of pictures? It is quite amazingly convincing.”

He showed no touch of shyness now, but answered after an instant's thought.

“I 'm afraid that is just what is the matter with the book. I 've thought about him ever since I went to school; then came the library and the papers; you wouldn't call them musty if you had read them. At length the whole thing was so alive that, when I came to write a book about it, it almost got in my way. It would be all the same if it were all utterly wrong. I couldn't alter it. It has convinced *me*: and now I 'm helpless. That is how I come at things.”

She was looking at him, her eyes full of smiles.

“That must be,” she said calmly, “why Professor Brownlow talked about new departures and the power of the eye and history-writing in the future.”

“He talks a power of flattery to other people; but he fell upon me solidly, when I told him what I’d done. Then he actually *read* it,—in manuscript and in the middle of term! and sent me off with it to the publisher the next week.”

“So apparently it is not all wrong, but very right.”

David’s eyes roamed to the Holbein.

“Who can tell that?” he said with a deep change in his voice,—“when they are ‘departed as if they had never been’?”

He felt her look on him and met it. Then the eyes of this new-met maiden spoke back to him a deep thing that none knew, save he himself. An awe fell on

his soul. What was this that held him? At length, he knew not how long after, he answered her as if she had spoken.

“You are right. One *can* touch them—”

“They can touch *you*,” said Gwen Brydon quietly. “That is why you could write that book.”

About four o'clock the next morning, David stood at his sitting-room window, drinking in the fresh breath of the dawn. He had not slept, and his bedroom seemed an unendurable and stuffy place.

He had much to think of, but he thought of none of it; only of one great Fact. Deep in what his grandmother would have called “his own dear self,” he knew what had happened to him. That maiden presence that his own had met to-night—met in that strange and sudden intimacy under the painted eyes of Sir Humphrey Nicholas—even that dear and exquisite pres-

ence, known as it seemed to him forever, yet a new and precious thing, would go on beside him always through life, whatever happened to either or to both of them.

But—what would happen?

David made no effort to answer the question.

The hour of answer was not yet. It would arrive and not be hastened. He, too,—and she—would travel on, as it would have them. These facts seemed inherent in the very nature of things.

A cool fragrance of new-growing grass came up to him from the fine green turf of the quad. Beyond its further angle of kind old College walls, a long church-roof, barely visible, lifted upon a gray and silent sky the broad and soaring lines of her great spire. Slowly a softly rosy light touched the edges of the stone, and grew and grew. Detail waked in crocket and pinnacle and carven saint. A solemn and

tapering shadow fell and grew upon the morning air and sky.

To the man who watched, the Oxford dawn seemed a picture of his own fate.

Then there waked in him something that was of life, and cast out fear. His heart cried out to the Maker of youth and of the morning for that brave and joy-born gift, a man's good chance.

"How did you get on with my friend David?" Bridget asked.

A person knowing it well has described the Oxford fly as "a kind of vault." The ancient city can certainly boast an undue proportion of ramshackle and faded vehicles. A fusty smell, as of damp and worn-out hay, always clung, for Gwen, about certain exquisite memories of her own: for she and Bridget went home in an old "four-wheeler."

"I found him interesting," Gwen said slowly. "We talked about his book."

In the dark Bridget smiled.—"I hope his next won't be a big step down. He has been soaked with the Founder, since he was about thirteen."

"He says all that stood in his way. I could trust his gift. One can't tell where it will go next, but—somewhere."

"You sound pretty sleepy."

"Oh, I'm not. I'm very much awake. I was only thinking—"

Here with a lurch and a rattle the cab drew up. The girls alighted and paid. Under the light on the landing, Bridget cast a quick, keen look at her friend.

"Good-night, beloved. It was a lovely party, was n't it?"

"Lovely," said Gwen, in the same tone, as Bridget turned away.

In her peaceful room, whose white bed

stood uncovered, Gwen slowly drew off her draperies of white and gold. She was glad to have no one to speak to: she seemed still to be in the lit hall under the friendly eyes of that square-bearded man in the flat hat.

“Kin and kind both,” she said to herself, “when next I feel alone in the world, I ’ll go and get another look at him.”

As the thought came, she stood still: then, rather suddenly, sat down on the bed with fixed and wondering eyes.

Alone! Could you ever be that again, while the world held another, who could think your thought and answer it before it was spoken—?

* * * *

“That ’ll do, Phyllis. Run her in under that willow. It ’s heavenly of summer term to begin like this.”

Bridget cleared a light wrap and, with some rattle, a tea-basket off the other cush-

ion. "Now let 's go ahead," she observed, reaching her book; "we 'll have tea—let 's see—in an hour, eh?"

Silence reigned. The light shadows of the willow-leaves played over the "Water-hen" and her burden, dancing on the girls' light frocks and on the open page. Other river craft went by with quiet splashings and scraps of passing talk. But neither moved.

It was after the hour before Phyllis looked at her watch; and, sitting up, pushed her hair back, and began preparations for tea. Bridget shut her book.

"It 's pretty lovely here," she remarked, leaning back. "We 'll miss the river when we go down. I wish Gwen would have come too."

There was an instant's pause, before Phyllis said, rather deliberately, "Bridget—what 's the matter with Gwen?"

A quick look, half amused and wholly

keen, crossed Bridget's face. "The matter with her?" she said to Phyllis' shoulder, "as how?"

Phyllis accomplished lighting the spirit-lamp.

"You're not going to talk about it, then?" she observed. "All right, if you don't want."

"By no means. Go on."

"You *must* see what I see, unless I'm crazy. And I'm not the only one. Lucy —"

"Lucy's comments are interesting; she is of a different civilization. But I'd rather know what you see."

Phyllis bent her face over the teapot. "Gwen's not herself." A little emotional sound was in her voice. "She forgets the oddest things,—when she's promised to help you, even. And she looks—"

"Perfectly lovely. It's said people often do, in her case. Yes, Phyllis—

something has happened to Gwen. We 've just got not to see it."

She sat up in the punt. The other girl still leaned forward, her face not visible. "Cheer up, child," Bridget said, "there 's enough of your Gwen to go round, even if—"

Phyllis turned on her eyes that swam; the springlike face of a fresh, clear-witted, eager maid, out of a country Rectory, and still young all over.

"I—I don't know anything whatever about—*those things*," she said deliberately. Her cheeks were rosy.

Bridget pulled her down, kissed her, and laughed.

"No," she said, "as for me,—well, I 've seen my brother through about three absurdities. But Gwen is somehow too big not to be visible. She moves all of a piece. Very likely she 's still unconscious. See, Phyllis, we 've got to protect her. If

Lucy, or any of them—especially Lucy—begins to talk, just choke them off. ‘Those things’ should n’t be discussed. They ’re one person’s business (I believe I mean two!)—and no one else’s. It ’s not for us to touch the thing. See?”

Phyllis nodded, looking into the willow-tree.

“It would be—beastly irreverent,” she murmured, as a canoe went by them swiftly.

“That tea will be stewed,” said Bridget.

When she began to sip her cup, she spoke again.

“I ’ve got a word more to say: but it is not—*ever*—to go beyond us two. You can hold your tongue, Phyllis. I ’ve a special reason for wanting silence round Gwen. I happen to know that there are things about—the other, that Gwen will have to hear. Only one person ought to tell her—himself. I ’m taking perhaps a big re-

sponsibility, but I don't mean even to hint them to her. And she won't hear them from any one else—unless there were gossip."

Phyllis nodded. She would as soon have sought to know who "himself" might be, as demanded an immediate interview with an archangel.

"All right. I promise. Is it going to be for long, Bridget?"

"All this term, I should expect," said Bridget. She paused and smiled. "To think I should come to be a mother to Gwen!"

* * * *

"We got to think over them two letters, my dear. One of 'em 's just as good as t'other. Yet you may be sure there 's a lot to choose, if you could on'y get at it."

Esther Bold sat in the chimney-corner, in a soft white shawl. "The weather," or some other obscure cause, had brought her

a slight return of last year's illness. Emily had come home to nurse her and sat sewing, in a neat print, opposite.

"I likes that first one the best," she observed, biting her thread, "'tis a titled lady; and I 'd be sure to get on with that upper. Swayne, she never taught you a thing, only druv you just to get the work done. Else I should n' ha' been so ready to leave. This one 's proper second housemaid with a 'between,' so as you can get on up. I ain't goin' single-handed again. 'Twas a mistake takin' Symes's place."

Her mother stretched a hand for the letters. The quiet face had a certain air of frailness, and a curiously deepened calm; but no suggestion of the old woman yet. She sat very still and perused the letters carefully before handing them back.

"'Tis true, my dear, about th' upper: and the money and all. I don't know how

'tis—somehow I 'd sooner thee took the t'other, but—”

“Here 's somebody coming down the path,” said Emily, rising. “'Tis—well, I never! *Dave!*”

With a scream, she ran to hug and kiss him in the entry. The mother did not move. He would not keep her waiting: and a moment's quiet after that sudden big leap of the heart was best for her. Folding the letters, she bestowed them quietly under the lid of her work-basket, which stood close by on a three-legged stool.

He came in, and stooped to put an arm round her, and let her hold him. He seemed very tall and strong beside her, and she knew at once that something lay behind his grave look. He would tell her in time. A perfect confidence dwelt between these two. When last spring Esther lay ill, “facing death,”—the countrywoman's matter-of-course—she had

known, with a lifting of the heart, that nothing would ever come between them now. That which was there was a thing not to be disturbed.

"I had a day free, so I ran down," he said; "I 've—news to tell you, Mother."

He paused, watching her. Emily from the background jumped to a seat on the table. "Oh, I say, Dave—"

"Hush, dear," Esther Bold lifted a hand. "What is it, my son?"

"My College have made me one of their Fellows. I only knew late last night. I came off to tell you, Mother. The post would n't quite do."

Esther Bold took her son's hand quietly. Emily leaped off the table.

"Dave, Dave, oh, Dave! I be that glad."

Her brother caught her to him and gave her a kiss. "Those were the words you said, Sis, when we danced up and down this

floor together, on a night when I knew I was going to a certain free grammar school.”

The two laughed together, holding each other's shoulders, Emily full of chatter.

Esther Bold sat by the fire, a still look on her face. “The Lord have been very good to ee, my son,” she said, when silence had fallen and lasted long.

When Emily ran down to shop for a rasher for supper, he sat on holding her hand for a long while.

“Have ee any more to say, my son?” she asked presently.

“How did you know? Yes—I ’ve more to say. In a week or two, Mother, I ’m not sure when, I am going to stay with some Oxford friends at their country house. There I shall meet some one—whom I love. I am going to tell her all my story. Very likely she will say me

‘Nay,’ but, yet—I think I have my chance. I ’ve known her some time, but not seen much of her. It seemed a thing hardly right to seek her, till after my degree. But somehow, when we meet, as we did last week and again yesterday, I seem to know her quite well. Why is it, Mother?”

“I take it, my son,” said Esther Bold calmly, “ ’t is ’cause you be the two. I ’ve knowed some while, my dear,” she added after a pause, “as there was someone, and as ’t was n’t my Miss Bridget. The Lord give thee joy of the maid, my son, and send thee thy heart’s desire.”

There fell a hush that he would not break. He looked at her furtively. He did not like these little illnesses.

“My dear,” said Esther Bold, and then paused, “she ’ll be a lady, I take it, and we ’re but poor folks. Thee be come up a gentleman, like we always said, and ’t is so she ’ll know thee. Thee won’t think

as thee must be constant coming here. She
—”

David Bold made a quick movement, grasping his mother's hand so tight that he all but hurt her.

“Mother—no. She's too big for all that. If she—should care, all would work out of itself. If not,—I—I—could not marry her. I have the right to speak to her. Oxford makes a man belong to his future, not his past. He is himself, and what he can do of himself, after that. Who gave me Oxford, Mother?”

She pressed his hand, not speaking.

“I should like you,” he said thoughtfully, “to know her name,—Gwendolen Brydon. You won't name it again, unless—She's a lovely woman, Mother. The first time ever I saw her, I saw she was like you.”

“Gwendolen Brydon,” said Esther Bold slowly.

Emily and the rashers immediately arrived,—then Father, stumping in, to have the Oxford news explained to him over the meal. When Esther had gone up to bed the two men sat there, the father smoking a long clay, and David joining him. When he knocked the ashes from it, his son got up.

“Father,” he said, “I have n’t thanked you for what you ’ve given me—for what has brought me to this day.”

William Bold looked up. He surveyed the tall man in his sound tweeds, whose head had a curious dignity that he understood not. And deep in his soul, he knew they were strangers. When he spoke, his voice had a touch of harshness in it, yet a hint of satisfaction.

“When you ’ve a-putt down a pot of money,” he said, “you do like to see something for it. Your mother’s uncommon pleased.”

XII

“SO,” said Glover, the butler, with ‘a look in his eye,’ “the gentleman’s comin’ down, this time, eh? When ’ll the wedding-day be, Mrs. Sykes, I wonder?”

“She ’ll make a lovely bride,” said Mrs. Sykes, breaking an egg with an air of sentiment.

“Here, Jane,” said the butler grandly, “you can put this letter on the spare-room mantelpiece.”

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The childlike gentleness of Lady Susan’s aged face was overcast. Her blue eyes were troubled. Her Honiton cap had even tilted a little on one side.

"I don't see how I *can* let her go," Lady Susan murmured.

"Of course you can't. Darling dear, your cap! Let me. If Jane wants to go home, she should make a clean breast of it."

"How can I, Gwen, with Watson so far from well? And yet I can't bear being hard on a servant. I wonder, could one put him off? But it's only for two nights, and so good for your uncle. He wanted him asked; Mr. Bold's so nice with him. It's not sickness, she said—"

"Surely, dear, then, it can wait?" Gwen's breath had caught a little. "See, auntie, shall I speak to her? We're rather friends. I won't have you worried into a headache."

"Oh, no, dear. It's settled now. But I'm not comfortable. Suppose her parents really want her. Such dreadful things do happen to the poor! They're

such *very* respectable people, Watson says. The father's a quarryman. And she's such a nice girl, only here a month and Watson can leave her to anything. *Just* what I want. I wonder what it is. Perhaps some brother's run away to sea, or they're in debt, or the father drinks—"

Gwen burst out laughing.

"Oh, dear, poor things! What a tender-hearted auntie it is!"

The *Times* here arrived opportunely, under the big cedar-tree.

When Lady Susan had entered upon a leader, Gwen got up and went in. She had seen a duster flutter out of her bedroom window, in the midst of reading out the paragraphs.

"Ah! Jane, has my lilac gingham come home from the wash?"

Jane set down the pail she was carrying away.

"No, miss. But I've sent round."

“Oh, thanks! Jane, I ’m sorry to hear you ’re in trouble.”

Jane stood upon one foot, flushing to the roots of her sandy hair. She reached after the handle of the pail.

“Oh, it ’s—it ’s not anything, miss.” Another woman’s eye saw it was very much indeed. “I ’m sorry I troubled her Ladyship, miss.”

“But—*what* is it, child?” Gwen thrust the door to, over the girl’s shoulder. “You ’re really in trouble, or you would n’t have spoken. And I might help. Tell me. It won’t go any further, I promise.”

The sense of common girlhood was in the tone. Lady Susan’s housemaid stood flushed and awkward. Then she gave a quick, hot glance upwards, (why can’t one say ‘uttered a glance?’ that is the truth) just one look, but it covered the whole, from head to dapper slipper-toe, of

Gwen's fair, dainty, summer-morning person. Then she dropped her eyes.

“Oh, no, miss! Not if 't was ever so!”

Gwen was startled. She felt as if she had been scorched. And she had no idea why. It was as if there was something hostile, almost tragic in the glance. Tragic! Jane! solid, steady-going maid-servant!

“But, if it 's so serious—” Gwen found herself saying.

“Oh, 't is n't, miss. 'T is—nothing. I only wanted for to see Mother.”

“Well, I 'm sure, next week, when the house is empty, my aunt will spare you gladly. Mrs. Watson will be better, and —”

“Oh, yes, miss. Please, miss, don't you trouble. 'T is just nothing.” And Jane, the color of a hot coal, seized her pail and was gone. Gwen shrugged her graceful shoulders. Well, you can't help some peo-

ple. But what on earth had made the girl look at her like that?

The girl went away, as in a desperate hurry, the pail clanging noisily down the passage. When she got into the roomy housemaid's cupboard, where the sink was, she thrust the door to behind her, setting down the pail with a quick rattle, with no attempt to empty it. She stood breathing quick, big drops of agitation and stress breaking out on her forehead. "Oh, dear!" she said in little gasps. "Oh, dear!" Persons of her condition do not soliloquize, save in such interjections, the natural vent of woman till that queer thing called culture has made her ashamed. If they did, she would have gasped out, "Her! her, of all people! Tell *her*!" She became quieter, leaning against the wall, her eyes fixed and troubled. Was ever poor girl put in such a corner before? Who ever heard of such a thing? Oh, what a

Heaven-sent blessing they called her "Jane"! 'T would n't never strike him to remember her second name, Granny's. If only she 'd written to him since she came here a fortnight ago! Mother would n't have given her address yet, thinking she wrote herself.

The helping wait dinner! Oh, there would be the trouble! What a mercy they used red-shaded candles! Perhaps he would never look up, nor catch her face. If he did—good heavens! what would they both do?

All at once sobs burst up into her throat. Oh, it was hard! She had n't seen him so long, except for that one night. But stand in his way! ruin his chance—

"Jane! Jane!" came in Mrs. Watson's vigorous tones, from the further landing.

The girl dashed her apron up into her eyes, and emptied the pail with a resound-

ing splash. There was no help for it. The thing had got to be faced.

It was tea-time when the guest arrived. From the bedroom window, when Miss Gwen's lilac gingham came home to be carried up, one could see the little group under the cedar, the white table with the pretty tray, all dainty china and silver; Lady Susan, old and elegant, in the wicker arm-chair; the Doctor with his big white hat; Miss Gwen's gracious figure in that pretty blue cotton, bending over the teapot, drawing up a chair;—*Miss Gwen!* why, if that happened! oh, goodness, such things could n't be!—And, clear to be seen, but with his back to her, that other figure, in dark brown tweeds, the black head, the shoulders. Oh, come, one mustn't get to crying again! How nice he did look!

Yes, David Bold, for a peasant boy, made outwardly a remarkably successful “gen-

tleman." When one has been taught from babyhood to fear God and respect one's elders, to hate a lie, and consider one's neighbor, one's root-principles are not fundamentally different from those regulating "the gentle life," socially so called. There was at moments a shy and rather needless modesty about him. That was all. For the peasant, pure and simple, is not a "vulgar" person. That means entirely something else. Small wonder none of the family had wondered whence he came, though Dr. Morcott thought he knew him well.

And there, upstairs, furtive and frightened, peering between the light summer curtains, in her tidy black frock and white apron and her neat little housemaid's cap, his own born sister, that had shared his baby plays and eaten hot toast off the same plate with him, stood and gazed at him with hungry eyes.

"You're fond of the country," Gwen said, as they strolled down the long path to the paddock.

David had come straight from three weeks' reading at the British Museum. The summer days in town, airless and dust-defiled, made all gardens more fair. He glanced round him, drawing a deep breath.

"I was born and bred in the country," he answered. As he said it, suddenly, a thing happened. The garden prospect, the overhanging beeches, the tangled bed of poppies mingled with white pinks, that ran beside the path,—aye, even the girl so close to him—were there no more. He was on a rough paved pathway, outside a gray thatched cottage in its neat garden, where, too, the pinks grew. To go in, to where the low-roofed, tidy kitchen glowed with firelight, and one in black gown and neat apron sat and sewed, he must step down,

through the brown doorway, must stoop his head a good deal.

The moment was very intense. It could scarcely have happened if he had not been vividly in love. He had come down here, eager, shaken with the seeing her again. In the broad, silent museum's matted spaces, amid the deep joys that came to him from dusty decipherments in solemn aged tomes, she had been never absent from him.

His life at Oxford had been always quiet, but never narrow. Every one knew he was poor, and had come up from a country grammar school. His gifts, combined with a certain simple directness of character, due partly to youthful sincerity, partly to his peasant instincts and upbringing, had saved him awkwardnesses. He had learned unconsciously, to adapt himself, as academic life teaches, to people, to circumstances. He had many friends.

That sudden acute memory smote him like a blow in the face.

All at once, now, he realized the gulf. It was as if he never had seen it yawn before. It was true that he no longer belonged to that life where his mother dwelt. A light puff of wind fluttered a blue cotton skirt towards him. Gwen, his gracious lady, to whose world he did belong, for good and all, who knew nothing about the other—

All at once one of those strange voices, as out of the Invisible, that, at weighty hours of life speak suddenly to shake, to inspire us, came to David Bold.

“Tell her now,” It said; “you have to tell her. Say ‘I am a quarryman’s son.’ ”

As It came, the two turned up the path again. When they reached the head of it, David stepped aside and gathered something from the border.

“Do you like pinks?” he said. His voice was not quite steady.

He had not spoken. He did not mean to speak. He did not know her well enough. He was not ready.—

Yet at the bottom of his heart—foolishly, unreasonably though it might be—he was ashamed.

As they passed over the lawn, a muslin curtain, caught by the warm breeze, suddenly billowed out of a first floor window. They both looked up. Then Gwen looked swiftly at him. Behind the billow she had seen, in a quick vision, something. Had he seen it too?

It was a furtive, eager face—the face of Jane the housemaid.

The red-shaded candles shone softly upon dark roses laid upon the white cloth. The soup had gone round. It was salmon now. There was an entrée to come next.

Glover was distinctly worried. He could not think what was the matter with the girl. As a rule, she waited capitally, was all he wanted. To-night she seemed to have lost her head, had missed out the guest! From the sideboard he did his best to telegraph to her; then he beckoned and thrust the plate into her hand. Mercifully no one saw him.

Whether it was her nervousness, or the fear of getting no fish, that disturbed the even tenor of his mind, David Bold became suddenly aware of he knew not what in the air. He glanced up. Suddenly he ceased to speak. That hot, strange vision of home leapt up once more. He had met full a frightened, deprecating, distressed pair of blue eyes. Bending to hand cucumber to the Professor, he saw his sister Emily.

David never knew clearly what he thought or did in that instant. An im-

pulse to spring up from his chair, to speak, came first, for one warm, natural moment. Then Emily's eyes, and an acquired instinct, that in that strange crisis half of him hated, the other half respected, kept him seated, silent. He was forbidden by all laws of good breeding, to make a scene. He bent his eyes on his plate and helped himself to salt.

Some one else had seen, some one sitting opposite him. A pair of quick girl's eyes had intercepted that speechless message.

The color flooded Gwen's cheek and neck. But he saw nothing but his plate.

"Are you drinking claret, Bold?" said Dr. Morcott, into the pause.

At the end of the interminable meal, and the Doctor's learned questions over the port, David Bold, wondering what he had done and said all that time, turned and went upstairs to his room. There was only

one thing he could do and he blushed in the dark as he did it. He walked across the room and rang the bell.

As he stood waiting in that first unoccupied moment, it seemed to him that he knew not who he was or what he was. He was less "in a strait betwixt two" than adhering to both, fighting fiercely for his rights in both. His mother—Emily meant his mother! Gwen, the new, insistent, exquisite love, that while the life beat in him, must come first of all things! The thing went so much deeper than the surface excitements, the question of tact, the hideous embarrassment, that, acute as they were, they seemed only to prick him like pins, amid the strong half-comprehended stabs of the deep instincts in struggle within. Yet they hurt acutely. In a moment Emily would be here.

But Mr. Bold was as yet but inadequately initiated into the due routine of a

careful household. As he stood in the dark, catching his breath, a dignified creak approached along the passage. In the twilit dusk came a decorous knock at the open door, and the offended but patient voice of Glover disturbed at his supper.

“You rang, sir?”

David could have leapt at Glover’s throat. “I—I want some hot water,” came from his lips lamely. For Emily’s sake, he could not ask for the housemaid.

Gwen sat by the lamp, drawing threads from a square of coarse linen. She did not look at David Bold as he came in. What did the thing mean? What had the housemaid to do with him, that their eyes met like that?

The girl was young, and there was pride in her, the hot pride of birth and breeding, the fierce, tenderer, tremulous pride of first love. She knew she cared for

this man. What had he to do with the housemaid?

David Bold took a seat in the shadow, not going near her, picking up a magazine. But he saw nothing else but Gwen. The bent head, the little fair tendrils of hair on the nape of the neck, the gracious slope of the shoulders, the noble brow. The sight of her took hold of him, as never till this moment.

A fierce question waked and burned. If she knew?

The workman's son knew himself—all at once—ignorant of her standpoint. The idea of a mean thought as hers would not realize itself within him. Yet—how did she look at things? If she knew, what would she say? She, the orphan maid with money, who, as he knew well enough, would dispose of herself.

Gwen—Lady Susan's high-bred niece, sister-in-law to the housemaid!

The idea was too bizarre to be taken in.

It was inevitable that the inherent temptation should be visible to David Bold. How could it not be?

To see Emily furtively, tell her to be silent, not to know him here. What harm in that? What so natural?

To acknowledge her, in the midst of this peaceful refinement, with all its delicacies of consideration each for other, to speak and tell Lady Susan, Dr. Morcott, that his pupil and guest, to whom they had shown exquisite kindness, and the girl whom they paid to empty the slops and make the beds were of one blood—would it not be like an affront?

Instantly, all through, he hated himself. The suggestion could have come to Esther Bold's son only from outside himself. She would have called it "a thought from the devil." He hated it. Yet there was honest perplexity in him. The situation

was an unheard-of thing. How could he do that?

Gwen swept down the passage with a rustle of silk skirts. She had shaken hands with the guest at the stair-head. As she entered her bedroom, Jane came out. She had just deposited a hot water can, and she carried another.

The guest had just entered his room opposite, towards which the girl crossed. Then she stopped and turned to go down the passage. She had seen him. But a voice said, "I want to speak to you." Gwen, invisible herself, saw the instant of hesitation. Then Jane had crossed the other threshold, and the door was shut.

"Oh, Dave! I didn't never mean! Dave—"

The sentence was cut short. The gentleman in dress clothes caught and kissed

the girl in cap and apron. Then he looked at her for an instant, his face unsteady.

“Bless the maid! she’s as red as the roses. Why didn’t you tell me you were here?”

“I never knowed as you was comin’, Dave. Not till Mr. Glover give me a letter for to put on your chimney-piece. Dave, I’m that sorry! But I shan’t say nothin’.”

The well-known tones with the burr of home in them brought a queer sensation into David’s throat. The eyes, with their wistful love, their anxiety, did not help. He suddenly took her by the shoulders.

“Look here, sister Emily, what time are you free to-morrow? In the afternoon? After tea? We’ll go out together.”

“Oh, Dave, I could n’t. They’d all be talkin’. ’T would come to Miss Gwen— Oh, Dave, I ’ood n’t stand in your way.”

The dark face flushed hotly.

“What time are you free?”

“Well, ha’-past five—But, Dave—”

“We ’ll have a chat then. Well, now, good night, Sis. I ’m afraid you ’d better not stop here.”

Gwen lay awake a long time. Thoughts unknown to her life visited her that night. Then she tossed through dreams for a short three hours, and woke in full summer sunshine, about six. She was weary and restless. The summer garden invited. She rose and went out.

Her heart was troubled. Nature was kind, under the dewy trees.

Yesterday she had thought him her own. Now she was proudly aware that she relinquished him. They were not engaged; she held no rights in him. There were many details in a man’s life,—also many women, who took what they called a

“broad-minded view” of them. They had a right to their view, if they liked it. But it was not Gwendolen Brydon’s. Old Nicholas blood, and withal certain things inherent in herself, said that in his relations with a woman, be she heiress or be she housemaid, a man either acted honorably, or he did not.

Going home to breakfast, through the woodland ways, some half mile off, she caught sight of a black and red uniform.

“Good morning, postman,” said Gwen, ever good-natured, “can’t I save you a walk?”

He pulled up, thanked her, shifted his bag from his back, and gave her the household letters. Gwen went on towards the house, turning over the little bundle idly to find her own.

All at once in the middle of the coachway, she stopped.

Whose address was that?

“Miss Emily Jane Bold,”—

Bold—? The only Bold was—That was a servant’s letter, obviously. The envelope,—the handwriting, said so.

“His people are poor.”

As with a growing light, something slowly unfolded itself before Gwen. A hot spot burned in her left cheek.

She went through the open study window, where a girl was sweeping. “Here ’s a letter for you, Jane, I think. I met the postman.”

Upstairs in her room Gwen stood still. Her heart yearned over what she loved. She had misjudged him.

Yes. But this was a new test. Would he stand it?

The girl’s lips parted in an anxious smile.

Heavens! What a moment for a man! To speak out, to confess!

Or else to risk for that other girl, who belonged to him, the gossip of the servants' hall, of all her neighbors in her own sphere. And—more than that. What would David Bold be worth, if he were silent?

“Yesterday,” Gwen said to herself, deliberately, “I meant to marry him. To-day—I don’t care two straws how he is born. He is himself. But the man I marry must be a gentleman!”

Uplifted and tremulous her heart shook within her; but by that test Gwen would abide.

David Bold was shy, speaking less freely than usual.

It might have been half-past ten, when Lady Susan, armed with a large and serious book and a white parasol, took her seat, as each morning, on the terrace, in the shadow of the house. After a few minutes a step approached her. “Lady

Susan," said David Bold's voice, "may I ask you for something?"

Lady Susan looked up. She had taken a fancy to this young man and she smiled upon him.

"Will you give me leave to take your housemaid for a walk this afternoon? She is my sister."

He stood quite still. It seemed to him, in the next instant, that he had sacrificed he knew not what.

Then, with a little quick movement, he looked up. On the drawing-room window-step, stood Gwen.

Esther Bold's son met his bride's beautiful eyes full.

EPILOGUE

A QUARTER of an hour before lunch, after a morning that seemed a dream, David Bold sought his room. He believed he was going to write to his mother.

Thrusting itself from beneath the pin-cushion on his dressing-table, he caught sight of the corner of a slate-gray envelope: and drew it out. It was unaddressed, but he opened it. His sister wrote to him on paper of this depressing shade. Some one had made her a present of a box of "fancy stationery": and Emily's limited correspondence took a long while to get through it. Inside was a half sheet.

"Dear Dave, I heard you with her ladyship, up at her bedroom window

sweeping. Dear Dave, don't say a word for them to know downstairs. If you wants me, come in the little wood out of the white garden wicket quarter to six, and I 'll be there. Your loving Emily."

David turned the missive over in his hands. His first impulse was to rebellion. Since Gwen, stepping quietly, after that encounter of eyes, down from the window-step, had passed round the corner of the house, and he had followed her, the world was new-made. He was in no mood to put up with any nonsense of the servants' hall. But he saw that Emily must know best where her own shoe pinched. Her brother must consent for once to slink out of the house to meet her, as if they had something to be ashamed of. When the hour came, he saw a white sailor hat among the trees, as he approached.

"Come along this ways," she said,

eagerly, "there won't nobody see us. Oh, Dave, why ever did 'ee go telling up to her ladyship like that?"

He only smiled. To make her understand why appeared to him an irrelevance. "Never mind, Sis. That's all right. I've news to tell you, if you can't guess it."

"To be sure I can," she answered, her cheek flushing hotly; "whatever do her ladyship say?"

"Her ladyship, kind woman—well, Miss Brydon has taken charge of her. It's you I'm concerned with now, child. Explain to me where downstairs comes in."

"Dave, if they was to know! I'd run right away home. I 'ouldn't have the face to stop. I sha' give warning to-night, now as you've told me. I sha' say as Mother wants me home. Her ladyship 'll let me go."

He pulled up in the midst of the path.

"I don't know that I can have that," he said, slowly.

"Thee can't help it," said Emily stubbornly. "I tell 'ee there 's things as you can't put up with, nor I won't."

(If a thing could be stupid, it was a man. Did he think his sister was going to sit and listen to that Glover's observations about him?) "Thee got to prevent 'em knowing," she repeated.

David had met that "dunt" look in those eyes, when they went together to school. Counsels of perfection, too, are not to be forced.

"You must have it your own way, I suppose, Sis. I 'm sorry you 'll be out of a good place."

"Bless 'ee, I can see to myself," said Emily, coolly. She looked into the recesses of the wood and smiled. "I mid be off to Canada for what I knows," she observed, looking at him obliquely. "No,

thee have n't heard nothing about that, nor more have n't Mother. She been ill, and I did n't mean leavin' of her. But I had a letter from him this morning." She felt in her pocket. "I must ha' lef' it in the drawer."

"Who is he, then?"

"Second gardener up to Damer's; John Ryman, you can mind of 'n."

"Certainly. And does John Ryman want my sister?" Something silent and elemental stirred in David as he spoke.

She nodded. "Mother she don't think bad of 'n. Nor Dad. But now he's got that far, as he means going out there in a year or that, and will I come too?" She paused.

"Will you?" her brother said gently, fresh from his own romance.

"I don't hold with them chauffeurs," said Emily, with seeming irrelevance, "else I might have had Captain Symes's.

Gives theirselves airs they does, wi' their caps, never was! Nor yet I don't wi' butlers. Look at that Glover! *They* don't know what 's in that pantry cupboard! And as for coachmen! bless 'ee! well!"

Her lifted chin spoke Portia's resolve, to "do anything ere she would be married to a sponge."

"Be there any honest men left, Hal?" David wondered.

"And second gardeners, eh?" he said and smiled. Emily pursed her mouth.

"Do 'ee think Mother 'd have let him over door-stone, if he had n't been pledge? They say as he 'll do well out there, when he 's got his chance. I don't know all of it—"

They went on together silently under the arching trees, till he found her looking aslant at him, and met her eyes. There was a dumbness in them as of old, and the old appeal, of common blood, of home.

But there was something else, that was new and a question.

“You ’re fond of him, Sis,” said David.

“Yes,” she answered slowly, “I been fond on him—this two years.” Silence again. Then, suddenly, a quick little sob.

“But I be awful fond—o’ *thee*.”

She had her arms about his neck. He drew her to him, and they stood together mutely, like lovers.

“I ’m—rich,” said David Bold, with a catch in his voice.

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The wooden-legged man glanced at the carriage at the head of the lane. Two young figures were turning in at his own gate. One, tall and gracious, wore a dainty white gown and a plumed hat. He pulled up crossing the field. The thing flabbergasted you a bit. Surveying his right palm, he rubbed it vehemently on his white trouser-leg, having first well

licked it. Poor William Bold! His wildest dreams had not pictured a woman like that.

His Esther sat darning in a low chair outside the cottage door. She looked up calmly as the gate fell to.

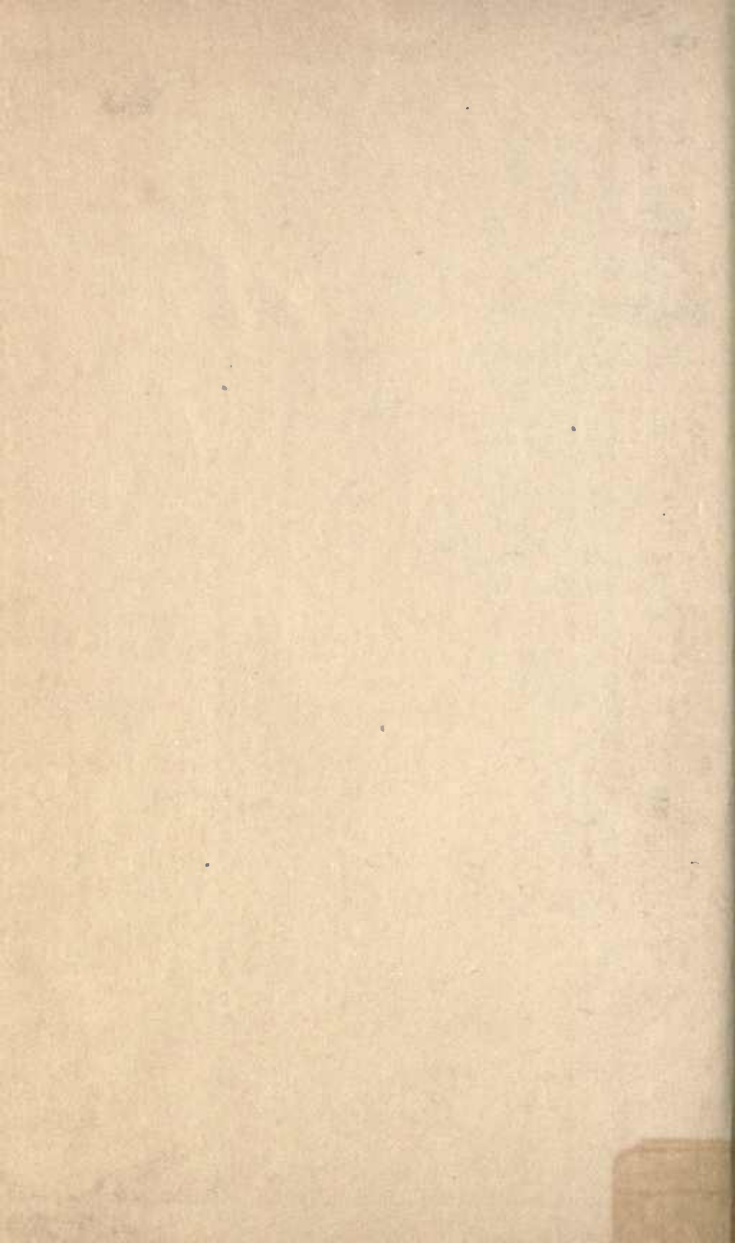
“Mother,” her son said, “I ’ve brought my Gwen.”

The maiden in white slipped quietly on to her knees, to be on a level.

“Please kiss me,” her deep tones said, simply.

The two women looked into each other’s eyes. Their lips met.

THE END



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UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



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